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AMAZING®

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DEPARTMENTS

4 **Robert Silverberg:** Opinion

7 **Robert Coulson & Frank Catalano:** Book Reviews

23 **The Readers:** Discussions

54 **George H. Scithers:** The Observatory

102 **Baird Searles:** Film Reviews

FICTION

28 **Larry Walker:** One Final Dragon

38 **Joel Henry Sherman:** Medium

55 **Jim Aikin:** Cleaving

80 **David Mathieson:** The Six-Legged Bear

98 **Walter J. Stutzman & Esther M. Friesner:** But Wait! There's More!

106 **Avram Davidson:** Young Doctor Eszterhazy

FACT

70 **Darrell Schweitzer:** Interview with Philip José Farmer

COVER: Alex Schomburg for "One Final Dragon"

POETRY: John M. Ford, p69; Peter Payack, p97; Everett Lee Lady, p162

CARTOON, CARTOON: William Rotsler & Alexis Gilliland, pp22 & 101

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Opinion

by Robert Silverberg

Almost thirty-five years ago, on the back cover of the first issue of his extraordinary new science-fiction magazine *Galaxy,* the brilliant editor H.L. Gold offered this pair of opening paragraphs from two stories that *Galaxy* did not plan to publish:

"Jets blasting, Bat Durston came screeching down through the atmosphere of Bblizznaj, a tiny planet seven billion light years from Sol. He cut out his super-hyper-drive for the landing . . . and at that point, a tall, lean spaceman stepped out of the tail assembly, proton gun-blaster in a space-tanned hand.

" 'Get back from those controls, Bat Durston,' the tall stranger lipped thinly. 'You don't know it, but this is your last space trip!' "

"Hoofs drumming, Bat Durston came galloping down through the narrow pass at Eagle Gulch, a tiny gold colony 400 miles north of Tombstone. He spurred hard for a low overhang of rimrock . . . and at that point, a tall, lean wrangler stepped out from behind a high boulder, six-shooter in a sun-tanned hand.

" 'Rear back and dismount, Bat Durston,' the tall stranger lipped thinly. 'You don't know it, but this is your last saddle-jaunt through these here parts!' "

Gold's target in this clever (and instantly famous) bit of prose was a kind of story all too common in the pulp-magazine science fiction of the 1940s — the transplanted western, in which venerable storytelling clichés were given a flashy new life by substituting Mars for Arizona, gzlploks for horses, and Greenskins for Redskins. Writers who used to earn a penny a word banging out the stuff for *Enthralling Western* found it no great trick to expand their markets a little by turning out similar commodities for *Stupefying Science Tales.* But that wasn't really what most science-fiction readers past the mental age of ten were hoping to find in the magazines; and Gold, a vigorous and uncompromising iconoclast, served notice right away that his magazine was not going to publish Bat Durston epics. (He also warned prospective contributors not to waste postage sending him stories in which the characters turned out to be Adam and Eve at the end, or the one about the alien life-force eater hidden in the Andes, or the one in which the characters travel to a hideous alien world that we finally find out is Earth — all of them well-worn clichés by the time *Galaxy* was launched in 1950.)

Clichés, it should be noted, are items that once had real value. In nineteenth-century printing terminology, a cliché was a ready-made stereo-

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type block that could easily be inserted ("clicked") into a printer's plate. But by 1892 it was being used in metaphorical extension to mean a commonplace phrase that could be inserted without the trouble of thought into a piece of writing; and in further extension it has come to mean any excessively worn concept. What began as a time-saver evolved into a time-waster, devoid of useful content. (Information, remember, is novelty.)

Gold; an acutely intelligent man, was more demanding than most SF editors, but even he was not incapable of making use of clichés. In place of the transplanted western, he eventually gave us the transplanted slick story — what James Blish used to call the "call the rabbit a smeerp" story, in which a cocktail party becomes a vilbar party and the rest of the story proceeds precisely as it might have done in *Cosmopolitan* or *Redbook*. That kind of stuff was more sophisticated than transplanted westerns, but hardly more nourishing to the real SF reader.

And now, many literary revolutions later, the old clichés are ostensibly gone, but a bunch of new ones have crept into science fiction. These are just a few:

• **The female villain.** In the bad old days we used to find stories full of sinister Saturnian dope peddlers, nasty asteroid-belt mining tycoons, quick-on-the-blaster bounty hunters, and other mustache-twirling scoundrels. They were all male, of course. *All* the characters in SF stories were male, except for the scientist's delicate daughter and the crusading newspaperwoman. We are in an age of liberation, now; and so we find stories populated by *female* dope peddlers, tycoons, and bounty hunters, just as villainous or even more so. Most of this space-opera junk is written by women who evidently feel they are just as entitled to crank out formula pulp stuff as men are. Indeed they are: but junk is still junk, no matter what the sex of the author or her characters. (Some men are writing this stuff too, to show how enlightened they are. I can't find any excuse for them at all.)

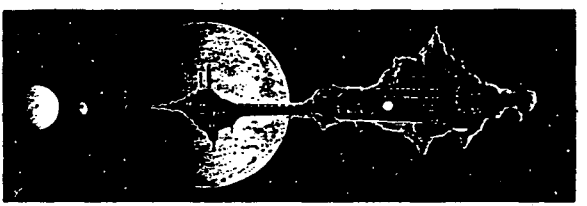
• **The trilogy.** C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, long ago, found themselves possessed by fantasy themes so immense that they needed three volumes to tell the tale. Isaac Asimov, also long ago, had an epic science-fiction theme that couldn't readily fit into a single volume. They had good reasons for writing trilogies. Nowadays, though, ideas that wouldn't ordinarily serve to pad out a novelet are routinely spun into tripledecker sets because some publishers noticed that the Lewis and Tolkien and Asimov trilogies had won big audiences. A lot of the new trilogies sell very well too, alas. But that doesn't entirely justify filling three volumes with a story that wasn't worth one.

• **Celtic lore.** There's a lot of lovely stuff in the Arthurian legends, the *Mabinogion*, the Cuchulain cycle, and so forth. It was nicely plundered by a good many gifted fantasists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it is getting plundered all over again today. I guess it sells pretty well too. Although I tend to write science fiction myself, I have always found fan-

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tasy just as enjoyable — but I long ago reached my saturation point with Cuchulain and Taliesin and Mordred and that crowd. Will the upcoming fantasy writers please start looting the Vedas or the Eddas instead, for a while?

• **False honorifics.** A minor point. But it seems that every science-fiction novel I open nowadays is stocked with characters named Vaskar piBrell and Lompoc syMethicone and Dilvibong vorVorkish. Those capital letters in the middle of names are starting to get to me. I think the problem is that it's one more aspect of the Graustark/Ruritania syndrome in modern science fiction — the adoption of the clichéd paraphernalia of the nineteenth-century middle-European romance novel, which I think deserves lengthier analysis on its own another time. Too many books are full of bemedalled noblethings with fake post-Napoleonic titles, strutting around pretending to be aliens. I think I'd prefer Bat Durston. ✂



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Book Reviews

by Robert Coulson

The Final Encyclopedia
by Gordon R. Dickson
Tor, $18.95 (hardcover)

Never say that science fiction's grandiose ideas died with Doc Smith. In this book, Hal Mayne battles the villains for control of human destiny, and you can't hardly get more grandiose than that. Mayne is a mysterious orphan in his early teens when the books begins; he gradually learns more about his own history, as well as the nature of the struggle he's embroiled in. The villains are the mutant Others, who have good logical reasons for their attempts to force humanity into stagnation and eventual race death. Science fiction is replete with stories of mutants, from Odd John on down, who suffered the persecutions of "normal" humans while remaining noble and altruistic; this group has an essentially more human reaction, as they intend to strike first and get control before the normals know what's going on.

Hal sees that control means stagnation, since new developments are inherently unpredictable and thus must be eliminated. Hiding from the Others while he's growing up, he eventually begins to resist openly. Dickson has neatly blended a story of the coming of age of a superman with a story of ideological warfare. There is some action and combat here, but most of the struggle is for the minds and hearts of men, as someone or other once said.

This is also the climax of the Dorsai books, since the nature of the struggle means that, however it ends, the Splinter Cultures — Dorsai, Exotics, and Friendlies — will no longer be separate sections of humanity. Losing will destroy them; to win, they must change their society. (Just as the British Empire disintegrated after World War II, despite having been one of the winners.)

The book is long and fairly slow-moving; since the conflict is of ideas more than action, there are numerous discussions of ideas, ideals, historical imperatives, social dynamics, and so on. Dickson makes a quite logical case for his theories, though I didn't always agree with him. He also makes it all interesting; it's a book I would have enjoyed reading through at one sitting.

There's an afterword by Sandra Miesel, on Dickson's Human History series in general. Dickson himself makes references to earlier volumes in the series, both published and unpublished. It's an important book, especially so to Dorsai fans; but even better, it's an entertaining book.

Beloved Exile
by Parke Godwin
Bantam, $6.95 (trade paperback)

This is the life of Guinevere, from the moment she learns of Arthur's death until her own death, years later. After Marion Bradley's Arthurian novel, it took me awhile to accept Guinevere as a heroine, but Godwin has done an excellent job in most respects and produced a fascinating

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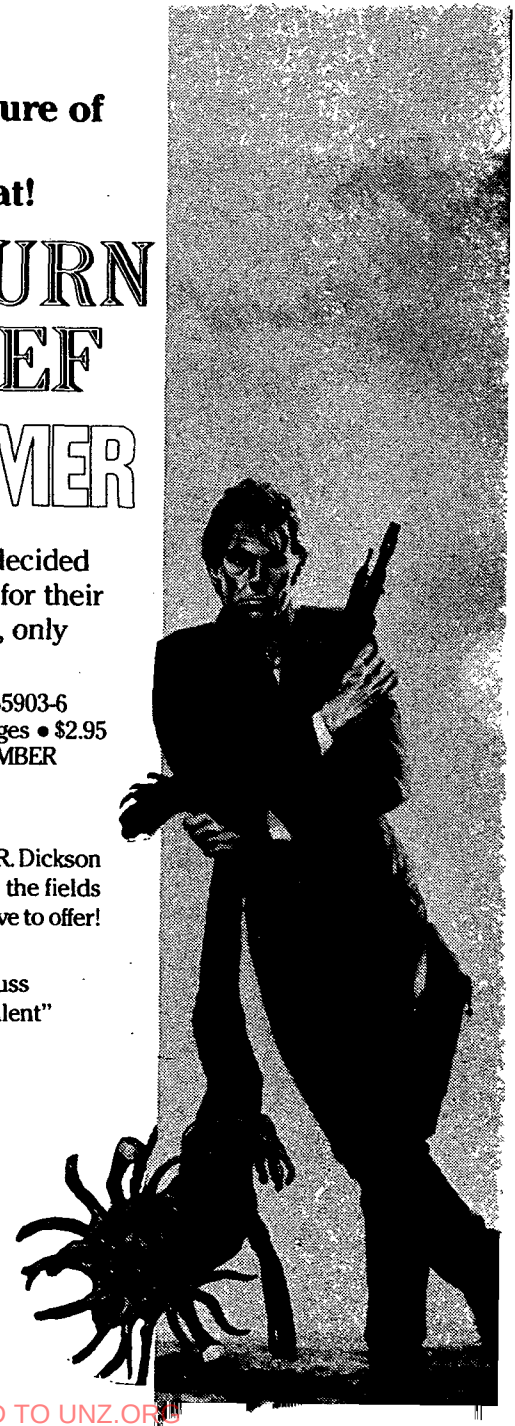
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character study. I do dislike one major plot development. Yes, having Guinevere captured by slavers and sold to an Angle landholder is a way of showing the lifestyle of these successors of Arthur's people; and yes, it allows some humility to be pounded into Guinevere's character; and sure, it's an explanation of why she wasn't around during the strife of Arthur's lieutenants and petty kings for the empty throne (since Godwin doesn't go for the monastery bit); and yes, it's far too melodramatic to fit easily into the rest of the account.

Godwin also specifically identifies various modern English traits with the Anglo-Saxons, as opposed to the Celtic traits of Arthur's Britons. The entire idea of "racial traits" is dubious to begin with, and classifying a people who began mixing with the Normans — and the Celts — over nine hundred years ago is exceedingly dubious. However, the basic story is excellent. Feminists should identify with the portrayal of Guinevere as a competent woman in a society not structured to accommodate such people, and anyone should appreciate a fascinating character and era.

The Adventures of Samurai Cat
by Mark E. Rogers
Donald M. Grant, $20.00 (hardcover)

There is also a $50 de luxe edition, which will probably be sold out by the time this review sees print.

I've been seeing Samurai Cat paintings and drawings at convention art shows for the past year, and have not been terribly impressed with them. The book is heavily illustrated, both in black and white and in full color; and I'm somewhat more impressed. Most of the text and too many of the illustrations are the sort of humor by exaggeration that I associate with juveniles and fans of TV sitcoms, which I suppose means that it's terribly popular, though not with me. However, anyone who can title one of his episodes "The Book of the Dunwich Cow" can't be all bad, and the painting of our hero splitting a lightning bolt with his sword is positively brilliant (electrifying, even); it's the perfect caricature of hundreds of muscular sword-swingers. The book's other sections are "Katemusha," "The Bridge at Catzad Dûm," "Beyond the Black Walnut" (another title I admire), and "Against The Gods," and I assume that all my readers can tell from the titles who's being parodied in each section. Fans of overdone humor will love it; fans of what I consider more tasteful humor will still probably find enough good spots to keep them reading.

The Burning Mountain
by Alfred Coppel
Charter, $3.50 (paperback)

The hardcover edition appeared last year, but I don't recall seeing any reviews of it. Coppel is an old-time science-fiction writer who has in recent years turned to writing thrillers about international intrigues. In this book, he combines the genres; the book is an account of the U.S. invasion of Japan in World War II. He's made it as accurate as possible for an alternate-world novel; the basic conflict is based on the U.S. plans for "Operation Coronet" and the Japanese "Ketsu-go Number 3" defenses, both available in their respective national archives. The split between our world and that of the book comes when a storm damages the first atomic bomb while it's on the test tower in New Mexico, forcing a delay of several months in the test. Nobody is willing to hold up the war for an untested weapon, logically enough, so the inva-

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sion is carried out on schedule. The major protagonists are an American lieutenant who was born and educated in Japan as the son of a banker working there, and the Japanese family he knew as a child. It's not a pleasant book, but it's must reading for anyone who thinks that our dropping "the Bomb" on Japanese cities was an international crime. How do you like genocide as an alternative? Coppel doesn't call it that, but it's what he's describing, and he has the facts to back it up. It would have been bloody beyond belief, both for them and us. This one is not just a thriller; it's a very thought-provoking book.

Plan[e]t Engineering
by Gene Wolfe
Nesfa Press, $13.00 (hardcover)

An edition limited to one thousand copies. This is Nesfa's tribute to the Boskone 21 Guest of Honor; it's a small book, but it features a variety of Wolfe's talents. There's a foreword (though not called that) by David Hartwell and a "Logology" by Gene, in which he gives some background on the material included (the background on the poetry was particularly appreciated and kept it from being *totally* incomprehensible). There's one essay, "The Books in *The Book of the New Sun*." The stories are "In Looking-Glass Castle" (feminism gone hog-wild), "The Rubber Bend" (a mystery-story parody, with some really atrocious puns included), "The Marvelous Brass Chessplaying Automaton" (a tragedy of the new Dark Ages), "When I was Ming the Merciless" (the logical extension of psychological experiments), "The HORARS of War" (the literal dehumanization of combat), "A Criminal Proceeding" (a parody of the — dare I say "mediazation"? Sure I do — of trials), and "The Detective of Dreams" (a symbolic mystery story). There are also three poems, which I didn't much like even with the background supplied, and an article on robot design and terminology from Gene's mundane publication, *Plant Engineering*. All in all, an excellent book. I didn't dislike the poetry any more than I do that of most modern authors, and the stories are much better than almost anyone else's.

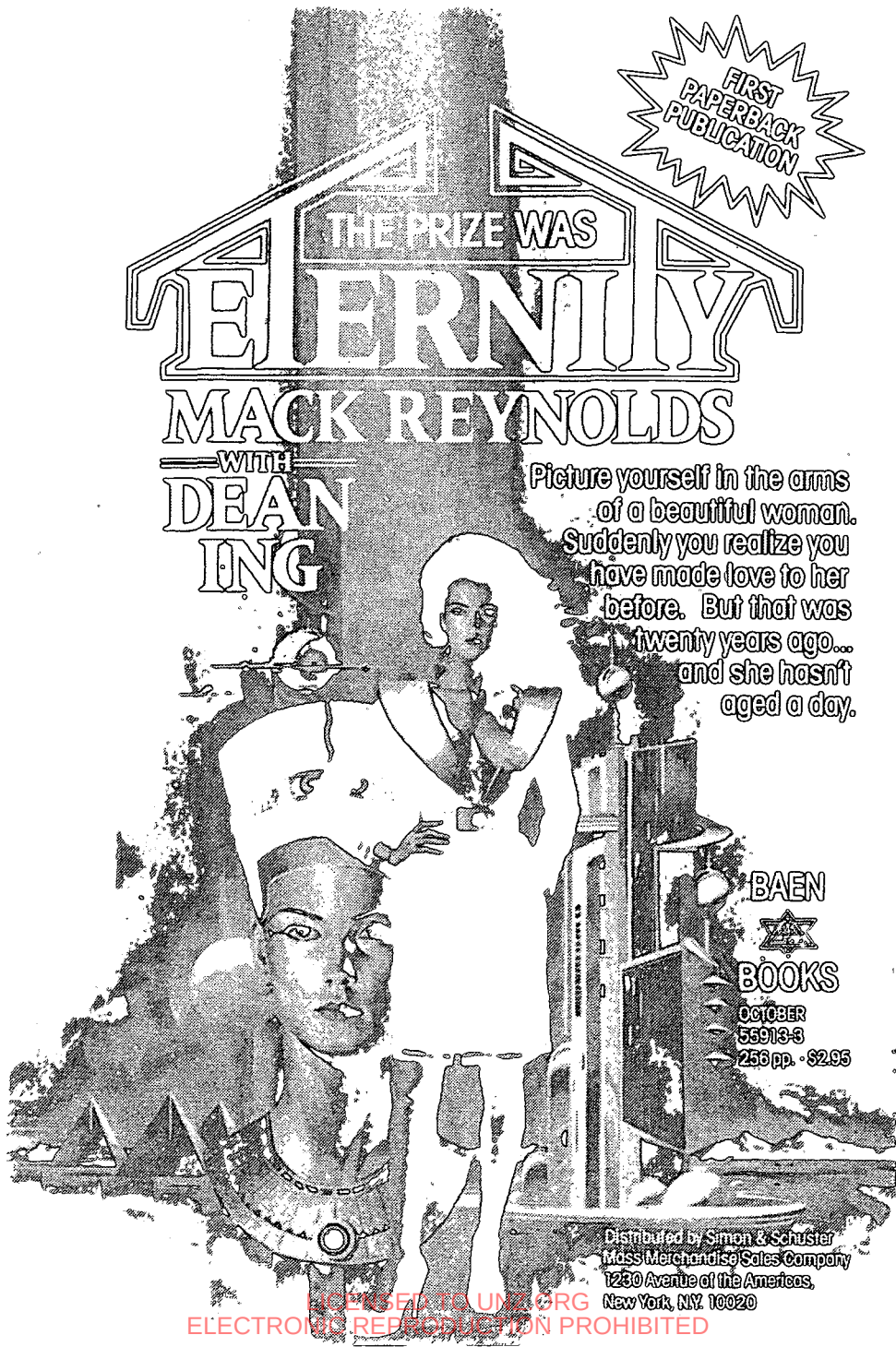
The Chromosomal Code
by Lawrence Watt-Evans
Avon, $2.50 (paperback)

This wins the prize for the hardest-to-pronounce title of the month, not to mention the hardest to spell. It's strictly space-adventure, with one more invasion of Earth, with a somewhat far-fetched explanation but an entertaining plot. Lightweight, but I read it through in one day, which I almost never do any more, even for outstanding books. It was nice to relax with.

Secret of the Knights
by Jim Gasperini
Search for Dinosaurs
by David Bischoff
Bantam, $1.95 each (paperback)

These are books #1 and #2 in the "Time Machine" series, a spinoff of Bantam's successful "Choose Your Own Adventure" books. These are, I take it, adaptations of the popular wargames and computer games to juvenile book publishing; after each two or three pages there is a decision point, where the reader must choose one of two ways of continuing the story. Obviously, the story isn't told in a linear fashion; at each decision point, the reader must jump forward or back a number of pages to continue. Usually, in this series, a wrong decision leads back in a circle to the decision

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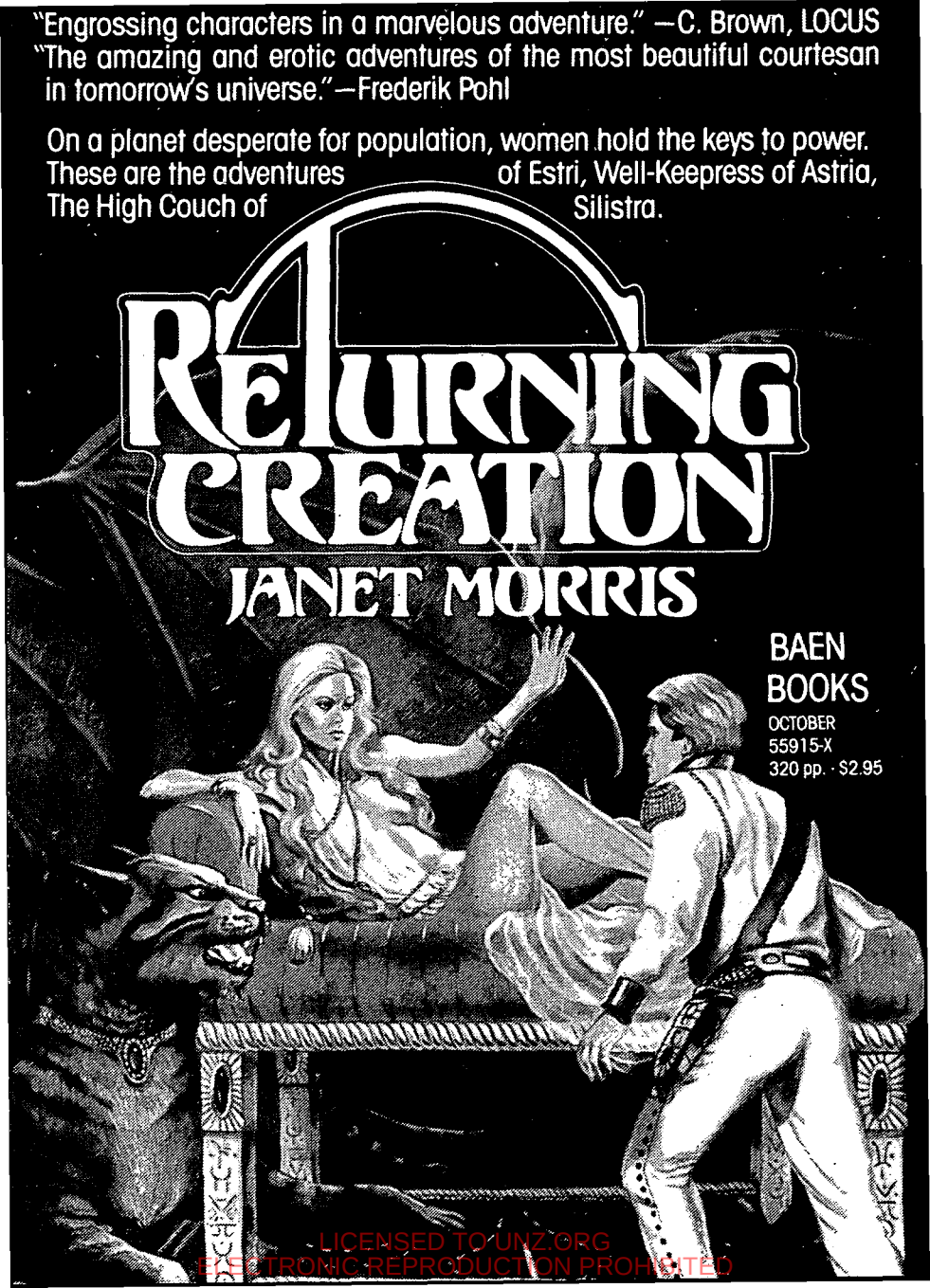
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point, where this time the correct decision can be made and the story can move forward again. With this sort of decision capability in 120 pages, the story is obviously pretty short and simple. Both books are in the form of a quest ("Your mission is . . ." They leave out ". . . should you care to accept it" in the interests of brevity.) Both are written in second person; "you" walk down the road, or ask questions, or run. The protagonist is always "you"; never "I" or "he." I haven't seen that used in science fiction since H. J. Campbell quit writing. An age level for readers isn't given, but I'd guess eight to eleven. The format seems popular; there are several series by more than one publisher on the stands, though this one is the only one with a strictly science-fictional framework. I'm not sure what it all means for publishing. It may well attract children who otherwise wouldn't look at a book; but I have my doubts about their going on to read Sturgeon and de Camp and Wolfe and Tim Powers. In the meantime, they're recommended as gifts for that exasperating young relative who plays computer games but won't read.

. . . Who Needs Enemies?
by Alan Dean Foster
Del Rey, $2.95 (paperback)

This is a companion volume to the earlier collection, *With Friends Like These* . . . There are fourteen stories included, with copyrights from 1976 to 1983. A good share of the stories first appeared in rather obscure publications, and may well be new to most readers. They include "Swamp Planet Christmas" (the humorous communications failure; I've read worse, but I've also read a lot better), "Snake Eyes" (a "Flinx" novelet), "Bystander" (a lovely gimmick is produced to rescue the protagonist from the hopeless situation he's in, which makes up for the fact that the hopeless situation is pretty improbable), "What Do The Simple Folk Do?" (the ultimate in audience participation; I tend to doubt the idea that blood and gore couldn't be faked successfully, however), "Gift of A Useless Man" (an unusual form of foreign aid), "Surfeit" (surfing on super-waves makes no more sense to me than the current type), "The Dark Light Girl" (mutants hiding their lights under a bushel), "Instant With Loud Voices" (the divine machine?), "Communication" (a not terribly amusing story of first contact), "The Last Run" (the competition with the devil, this time in auto racing), "Wu-Ling's Folly" (an old-time Westerner takes care of a few legendary menaces), and "Village of the Chosen" (a new scientific discovery in a moderately interesting story with a marvelous last line). It's a pretty good, varied collection; moderately recommended.

The Reenchantment of the World
by Morris Berman
Bantam, $4.95 (paperback)

I almost quit reading this one on page 8, where the author says that science is not the cause of our current emotional malaise, because "causality is a type of historical explanation which I find singularly unconvincing." However, further reading gave me a more favorable opinion of the work, though I still think he's flat-out wrong. This is a work of philosophy, in which the author tries to tie our current social and economic troubles to the specific world-view engendered by Europe's adoption of technology and capitalism; it fostered a belief that nature was to be used rather than participated in. His solution is, briefly,

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that we need a more humanistic world-view, and that we can get one by exploiting recent breakthroughs in psychology and sociology. (Assuming that the studies he cites actually are breakthroughs, of course.) Technology and science would be kept, but directed by the new world-view. I disagree with a good many of his arguments, but he does have them well-buttressed with facts. (Selected facts, of course, but then every argument has that flaw.) In any event, it doesn't matter much. Science and capitalism weren't adopted because philosophers thought they'd be good ideas, but because they produced greater benefits than did the previous system. Any change will come gradually, and for the same reason. The book could be quite useful for authors modeling alien societies; the metaphysics is quite detailed, and could be used to describe alien ways of thinking. (All ways of thinking but mine are somewhat alien, of course; Berman's, however, is slightly more alien than the average.)

The Stars Are the Styx
by Theodore Sturgeon
Bluejay, $6.95 (trade paperback)

Bluejay has reprinted this Sturgeon collection as a "special edition," with goodies like acid-free paper and an excellent cover by Rowena Morrill, depicting Sturgeon as Charon ferrying a load of souls across the Styx. Stories included are "Tandy's Story," "Rule of Three," "The Education of Drusilla Strange," "Granny Won't Knit," "When You're Smiling," "The Claustrophile," "The Other Man," "The Stars Are the Styx," "Occam's Scalpel," and "Dazed." I'm not noted for empathizing with emotional writing or the humanistic viewpoint, but Sturgeon does it so *well*. I don't think this is his best book; the stories are good enough, but not one remained in my memory from having read the previous publication five years ago, while I can recall the basic ideas of a few Sturgeon stories that I first read in the 1950s. (Still, this allowed me to be absolutely fascinated by the book when I re-read it, and I recommend it highly.)

Singer In The Shadow
by Cynthia McQuillin
Off Centaur, P.O. Box 424,
El Cerrito, CA 94530,
$9.00 (cassette tape)

Cindy has the sort of voice I could fall in love with if I wasn't already happily married; but then, I'm partial to contraltos. There are 28 songs on this 60-minute tape, most of them obviously rather short. Quite a bit of material based on Darkover, plus original fantasy and stf songs. Recommended.

by Frank Catalano

Warday
by Whitley Strieber & James Kunetka
Holt, Rinehart & Winston,
$15.95 (cloth)

There's something attractive about nuclear war. It's in the same league as the morbid curiosity many of us feel when we come upon a messy car accident; we know we shouldn't look, but we want to, because after all we've heard about how bad they are. But we want to see for ourselves: are they

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really that bad?

Of course, nuclear war is on a slightly bigger scale than a bad car accident. But still, our curiosity demands to be sated: movies like *Testament*, *Fail Safe*, and *On the Beach*; television programs like *The Day After* and *Special Bulletin*; countless pre- and post-holocaust novels. We want to look just in case, God forbid, someone leaps.

Such a feeling of "you are there" is the idea behind Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka's *Warday*. It's a science-fiction novel masquerading as a non-fiction book; a travelogue of post-holocaust America, written in the first person by two writers who have travelled what remains of the U.S.A. following a half-hearted nuclear exchange.

On October 28, 1988, the Soviet Union responded to the deployment of an anti-missile satellite network by nuking the space shuttle that put the first of the satellites into orbit, followed by a first nuclear strike that turned Washington, D.C.; much of New York City; San Antonio, Texas; and parts of the upper Midwest into slag. The U.S. responded moments before the bombs hit, but by then the war was over.

Now it's five years later, and Strieber, who's given up horror writing (he actually has written *The Wolfen* and *The Hunger*) to do hydroponic gardening, and Kunetka, a newspaper reporter (actually a non-fiction writer), decide to travel the U.S. to find out how people really are dealing with the effects of what's simply called Warday. They travel primarily by train, and along with their descriptions of the trip are interspersed official documents the two have managed to acquire and transcripts of interviews they do.

The U.S. they find is one starting to recover, but rapidly turning into sub-countries because of the breakdown of the Federal bureaucracy. Even though the seat of the Federal government has moved to Los Angeles, relatively unaffected California, Oregon, and Washington have turned into nearly independent states with strict border patrols; a good chunk of the Southwest has been taken over by Hispanics and turned into the country of Aztlan; and what remains of New York City is being dismantled.

Strieber and Kunetka appear to have done their homework. A good amount of the damage was caused by nuclear explosions not on the ground but high in the atmosphere, creating what's called an electromagnetic pulse, deadly to electronic equipment. In addition, disease and hunger have killed far more people worldwide than the war did. There's also a convincing feeling you get — not readily evident in most After-the-Bomb tales — that people truly did not know what was coming down when the bombs hit: after all, with electronics and communications out due to the EMP, how would you pass on news of the attack? Even the scenario is a convincing one, blaming no one for really "starting" the war (did the U.S. provoke it through ignorance or did the Soviets not make their feelings clear enough?), though I winced when I saw the name of the shuttle shot down: the unflyable *Enterprise*.

Not everyone's going to like this book. What I believe is its greatest strength — the very strong presence that you indeed *are* there — may drive some to being so uncomfortable they don't want to read it because they don't want to think about nuclear war. Others may not read it because they don't believe anything could survive

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such a war. And if you read it, you may find the last few sections a bit on the repetitious side.

But should you pick up *Warday*, you'll read a fascinating account of what may be. It's not pretty, but Strieber and Kunetka point out it's not without hope, either. *Warday* pays attention to the important everyday detail that would affect all of our lives in such a situation. You may even find yourself wondering what you would do if *you* were there.

Demon
by John Varley
G.P. Putnam's Sons, $14.95 (cloth);
Berkley, $6.95 (trade paper)

A very different end-of-the-world tale is John Varley's *Demon*. Calling it an end-of-the-world tale doesn't give away anything, either; Varley advertises it as such even before the first page of the story.

Demon wraps up *THE GAEAN TRILOGY*, begun with *Titan* in 1979 and *Wizard* in 1980. The four-year lapse between books two and three has had Varley fans anticipating the final novel much as music fans once awaited a Beatles reunion.

And it's no disappointment. *Demon* takes all the loose ends, ties them together, and does so in characteristic Varley fashion.

For the uninitiated, Gaea is a living, wheel-shaped world, an alien, on whose inside surfaces varied kinds of life thrive. Among them now are humans, following the accidental discovery of Gaea by Cirocco Jones and her crew several decades past. Gaea isn't doing too well, though — three million years of living and internal dissent within Gaea's own "brain" have caused problems, mental and physical. And Jones, who once worked closely with Gaea as her representative, now is her sworn enemy.

In *Demon*, Gaea has become something of a haven for humans thanks to a slow-motion nuclear conflict that's methodically destroying Earth. Rocky Jones has had to come to her senses enough to become a leader — again. And Gaea has gotten even flakier, pointing to an inevitable confrontation between her and Rocky.

Varley seems to have had a lot more fun with *Demon* than with the first two books. The most convincing evidence is that by now, Gaea is so enamored with Earth movies (that's right: movies) she now travels with a moveable film show that produces epics — and her personification is as a 50-foot-tall replica of Marilyn Monroe. Second-guessing the author is a no-no in reviewer's circles, but the way Varley treats the film industry by implication strikes a cynical note that makes me want to guess it reflects how he feels about Hollywood's attempts to make his short story "Air Raid" into a movie. But I could be wrong. I was, after all, wrong about the ending of *Millenium*, Varley's previous novel (based on "Air Raid"). I thought it was stretching for Significance; instead, I'm told by the author himself that it was a joke.

But back to *Demon*. It's good. It's recommended. It may not be as "serious" as the first two books, but it wraps everything up, and even ends in a manner appropriate to the character involved. *Demon* is just the book to show that no matter what Varley writes, he writes it well.

The Shattered World
by Michael Reaves
Timescape $15.95 (cloth);
$6.95 (trade paper)

While we're destroying the world, let's go all-out and fragment it as well.

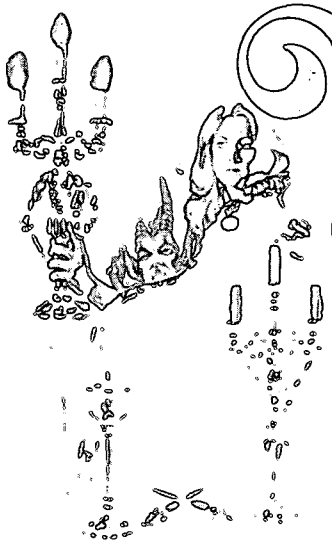
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But let's leave some people and societies living on the fragments, and throw in some magic to keep the fragments in their proper "orbits" and give them gravity and atmosphere. Then let's pick up Michael Reaves's *The Shattered World* and see how *he* deals with it.

The Shattered World is set on an Earth that's been, appropriately, shattered; and it's all being blamed on the long-dead Necromancer. Seems that this society, which uses magic, shuns the use of any magic that relies on the power of the dead. The Necromancer didn't share society's aversion, but even though his methods are avoided by most wizards, he was considered the most powerful of them. The problem now is that some wizards want to see the world whole again, and they're not afraid to search for the same source of power that the Necromancer used.

Into this comes Beorn, a master thief and unwilling shapechanger. He's recruited by the forces who want to reunite the Earth's fragments to steal a Runestone that helps keep the fragments in their proper places. But instead of completing his task, he finds himself at the center of the battle between those who would follow the Necromancer and those who fear him.

Reaves does a good job of taking what could be an unconvincing and implausible premise and making it work. The reason, likely, is that instead of focusing on the "gee whiz" aspects, Reaves focuses on the characters and makes you want to know more about them. That may not sound like a great accomplishment, but it keeps a novel of this sort from turning into nothing more than a world tour.

One bitch: the actual explanation of what caused the Earth to break apart offered near the end of the novel, instead of being a great revelation, inspired a yawn. It just didn't seem to fit in with the majestic tone of the rest of the storyline. But on balance, it's just a minor blemish. *The Shattered World* is a rich, unusual novel with an excellent focus on the people involved.

The Integral Trees
by Larry Niven
Del Rey, $14.95 (cloth)

Where creating believable characters is Reaves's strong point, it's not so with Larry Niven. Despite that, *The Integral Trees* is an interesting novel, though not one of Niven's best.

As with *Ringworld*, Niven creates a very unusual and well-thought-out setting for his latest novel. Integral trees get their name because they're shaped like integral signs in mathematics. They're also the only place where human life exists in the gaseous envelope around a neutron star. The trees are miles long, and on them live colonies of humans: the descendants of a slower-than-light starship that arrived at the neutron star hundreds of years earlier.

An ecological crisis leads members of one of the colonies to explore the tree they live on, and to find out what happened to the descendants of other crew members. But at the same time, the cyborg intelligence on board the ship that brought humans to the area is alerted to unusual activity in the gaseous envelope. That intelligence, loyal to the State, wants to see what's happened and remind the humans, who have now forgotten, that they are also to be loyal to the State.

Though Niven has improved over the years, his characters still echo the dull thud of particle-board at times; and none of them are exotic enough to make you forgive, as with the alien races in *Ringworld*. I'm not saying this

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isn't a good novel because it isn't *Ringworld*; it's just that the characters aren't up to the same par as Niven's science. And his science is excellent, among the best of the hard-science SF writers.

There's also a problem with the ultimate conflict between the ship intelligence and the descendants — instead of a head-on collision, it comes across as merely a glancing blow. But the ending does leave the way open for a sequel. Or two.

Niven fans will like this, as did I. But while the setting is unique and the science excellent, *The Integral Trees* falls short of being a truly good hard-SF novel.

Green Eyes
by Lucius Shepard
Ace, $2.95 (paper)
Neuromancer
by William Gibson
Ace, $2.95 (paper)

Sometimes, resurrecting a project that's once been successful and expecting it to be so again is a little like raising the dead. It *looks* familiar, but something's missing — and my God, what's that smell?

Luckily, that's not the case with the new Ace Science Fiction Specials. Back in the late '60s and early '70s, Terry Carr edited a series of paperback originals, many of which were nominated for and even won major SF awards. Now, Carr and the Specials are back, and — to judge from these two new Specials — it's a triumphant return.

Buck has given his opinion of the first of the Specials (*The Wild Shore* by Kim Stanley Robinson) elsewhere, so I'll limit myself to the next two in the group. But in all three cases, the Specials are first novels by some of the most talented short-story writers in the field who, not surprisingly, have also appeared in Carr's many *Universe* anthologies.

First to Lucius Shepard's *Green Eyes*. It's a creepy-crawlie sort of setting, and works because Shepard doesn't go out of his way to set the eerie elements of his stage for us. It's set in the near future in the South, where a secret project has found a way to revive the dead. The kicker is that the dead revived aren't the same people that were in the body to begin with. The experimenters don't seem too concerned with how the zombies themselves feel about their new "lives." But one of the revived, Donnell Harrison, is confused and finally concerned about mysterious powers he and his fellow zombies seem to have, along with the disconcerting sparks of green that glow in their eyes. His search for an answer leads him to escape the secret project, and finally wind up in a voodoo cult deep in the Louisiana bayou.

Where a cheap shlock writer would have gone for the shock effect of the more horrific aspects of the story, Shepard keeps it on the edge of reality — a difficult task, considering some of the characters. My suspension of disbelief was in danger in that part of the story where Shepard tried to explain part of what's going on with an alternate reality. It was nearly too much of the fantastic for one sitting. Other than that, though, the setting is solid, the characters understandable, and the storyline entertaining and thoughtful.

Neuromancer by William Gibson is at the other end of the spectrum in setting. *Green Eyes* is lush with rotting vegetation and mystery, but Gibson's *Neuromancer* is slick in a future of high-tech out of control.

Case is a cowboy, the kind that

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hooks into the computer matrix and tries to break into systems to steal data or change it. He was one of the best until he tried to double-cross one of his employers, who saw to it that he suffered nervous-system damage that kept him off the job. Off the job, that is, until a man with a lot of money and not much background came along to cure him and to hire him for a project to crack the biggest system he's ever run into: one with self-awareness.

What keeps this from being just a caper novel set in the future is the way the future is laid out. It's commonplace for people to be "improved" with microelectronics and implantable software, and not unthinkable to have a person live on in a personality matrix, even after the body has gone. Readers familiar with Gibson's excellent *Omni* short stories "Johnny Mnemonic" and "Burning Chrome" will see echoes of those futures here. It's fast-paced but not so fast that you don't get time to care about Case and the other characters, or to marvel — in passing — at what Gibson has done to our increasingly technology-dependent society.

If Terry Carr has it within him to keep finding writing of this quality, the new Ace SF Specials bear watching, and reading. ✂

CARTOON **CARTOON**



William Rotsler **Alexis Gilliland**

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Dear Mr. Scithers,

Thank you for sending me your booklet on *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy* that covers manuscript format and some of your ideas on Plot, Background, Characterization, and Invention. I suspected that I could afford to learn something about those things, and I was right. My first story had characters and ideas, but no plot or background. My second story had a plot and background, but no ideas and characters.

Yesterday I thought of an idea and some new characters. Only I didn't much like the characters, so I thought of other characters. The new characters are kind of assertive. They didn't like the old characters, so I dumped the old characters. They also didn't like the idea, so I had to get rid of the idea.

This morning when I got up and went out to walk my dogs, I found that my characters had been talking things over during the night. They have decided that they do not want a plot. They say that a plot would be uncomfortable at the least, and possibly even dangerous. Also, they have decided on an ending. They've decided that they're going to head for Alaska and live happily ever after.

So now I have a story with some characters and background, but no plot or ideas. Even worse, it has a beginning and an ending, but no middle.

I understand that a number of writers and some editors think it's OK to have a story with missing pieces that the reader has to finish himself. They call it "experimental." As a reader, I've always hated stories like that. I've always figured that if I had to do the ending, I'd just as soon do the middle and the beginning also. But now I'm starting to see it their way.

Of course, I know better than to try to send such a story to you. You would not be pleased. You would say so. Probably not very gently, either.

But . . . maybe you could tell me the name of some slightly unintelligent editor who would get all excited about an "experimental" story with no middle, and who wouldn't notice that the story didn't work.

Alternately, maybe you could send me the names of some other writers who have sent you stories with no beginnings or endings, and we could all get together and sort of mix and match.

By the way, can you give me the address of the SFWA? I called the Benton County Center for Alcohol and Drug Abuse, but they told me that there is no such thing as Science Fiction Writers Anonymous.

[Another letter.]

A few months ago I wrote a science fiction story. When I was through I didn't know what to do with it, so I started looking into the science fiction field to find out.

I found out that it is traditional to put science fiction stories on a shelf in

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the closet and forget them. Unfortunately, my closets are all full of dirty laundry. So I put the story into an envelope and mailed it to an editor.

I thought I had taken care of things very nicely, but a few weeks later, the story came back from the editor. My closets were still full of dirty laundry, so I put the story in another envelope and sent it to a different editor.

Hell. Just this morning the damned thing came back from the second editor. And my closets are just as full of dirty laundry as ever.

I've decided that I need a more permanent solution.

Therefore, enclosed please find several items of dirty laundry.

[Yet another letter.]

I am very new at this game of sending stories to editors. But already I've noticed that about half the time the manuscript comes back without the paperclip.

At first I just thought that maybe editors are the kind of people who drop things a lot. I've never seen an editorial office, but I began to imagine that they are knee-deep in paperclips.

Then I started keeping track of the paperclips to see whether it's half the editors who steal all the paperclips, or all the editors who steal half the paperclips. Well . . . it seems that almost all the editors steal half the paperclips.

Maybe something about editing causes iron deficiency anemia. The editors may spit back most of the manuscripts, but they seem to *NEED* the paperclips.

Let me commend you for running a unique editorial operation. Not only have you never ever even once stolen any of my paperclips, but on two separate occasions I sent you a manuscript with a little paperclip and the manuscript came back with a great big one. I'm sure I should be able to draw some important conclusion from this, but I haven't figured out what.

Sincerely,
Carol Deppe
Corvallis OR

Fact is, we like manuscripts with their attendant return envelopes, cover letters, and our notes to be secured by adequate *paperclips while they are in our office. With returned manuscripts, we wouldn't want anyone to overlook the subscription form we always enclose. When we have to fold a MS and stuff it into a dinky inadequate return envelope (contributors note!), we cheerfully omit the clip. So now you know.*

As for SFWA, it doesn't stand for Science Fiction Writers Anonymous, although there may be a need for such an organization, nor does it stand for Seasonally Furry Wombats Accumulated, as has never once, even to this day, ever been alleged, but rather for ***Science Fiction Writers of America****. SFWA is the organization of science-fiction professionals, and full membership is reserved for people who have sold at least three stories or one novel, although there are shades of associate membership, and anybody can subscribe to* SFWA Bulletin, *which contains many useful articles for writers. Inquire of Peter D. Pautz, Box H, Wharton NJ 07885.*

— George H. Scithers

18 March 1984 i.e.
a.d. XIV Kal. Apr.

4 Binson Green
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Surrey, SM4 5JJ ENGLAND

David Doughan eminentissimo

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illo redactori *Fabularum Obstupeficientium* s.d.

Re: *Aquila*, May '83

I'm afraid that you should change your in-house Roman-history expert. According to Suetonius, J. Caesar's dying words on seeing Brutus about to deliver the *coup de grâce* were: καί συ τέκνον; (*kai sŭ, teknon?*), i.e. "You too, child?" This not only caused much speculation about Caesar's relationship with Mrs. Brutus Snr., but was pretty good Greek. Admittedly, Suetonius is a fairly unreliable source, but he's the best we've got, as perhaps Sgt. Fredriksson should have spelt out. Certainly "Et tu, Brute?" is 100% pure unadulterated Shakespeare (who lived some 1,500 years after Suetonius). If good master Sucharitkul really wished to quote the Moderns, he might have turned to the Kinematograph, and especially *Carry on Cleo*, in which Caesar's last words were reported as: "Infamy! Infamy! They've all got it infamy!"

Vale.

Well, we checked. You're right that Suetonius does indeed report that "some people say" that Caesar uttered those last words, and in Greek too. Dio Cassius reports the same last words as fact rather than hearsay, but then Dio never was very good at telling the two apart. Josephus and Appian both mention the assassination but give us no last words at all. So, maybe Caesar was pretentious to the last, but considering the tendency of all these writers to dramatize and "improve upon" their material, we shall never know. But it is more significant that none of these ancient writers mention steam cars, *or Terra Novans, or large green pigs, for that matter. A conspiracy of silence? Perhaps, but in any case we can hardly trust them on such relatively trivial matters as Caesar's relations with Mrs. Brutus Snr. Another possibility is that the timelines have been so tangled up by the Time Criminal that we remember the utterance in Greek from one version, in Latin from another. As for Shakespeare, well, he was divinely inspired (by the Muse of poetry) and is therefore not open to question.*

— The In-House Expert

Dear Mr. Scithers:

Interestingly, a studio producer sent papers for an option on the screenplay version of "Cosmic Match, Inc." on the very same day you rejected the short story. The producer's feelings were that:

a) The demographics of the Friday night, Saturday night dating audience would tune into such a story.

b) The concept of an intergalactic matchmaking service centered in Manhattan is "wildly imaginative and commercial."

But, you were right in regards to format. I was slovenly and absent-minded on many of the points you kindly sent me.

Only when I have a story that is more scientific-minded and 100% to format, will I borrow your time again.

Sincerely,
Calvin Bruce Holland
Brooklyn NY

Congratulations on your TV sale! We wish you every success. But at the same time we must point out that you're dealing with the same medium that has recently given us such . . . ah . . . items as Battlestar Galactica, Automan, *and* V, *none of which could possibly have made it as printed science fiction. (Novelizations don't count.) In fact, it seems to be a rule*

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that if an idea is simplistic and familiar enough to interest a television producer, it is too hackneyed for further literary use. Now, if you'd sold your screenplay to PBS, you would have given us pause; but commercial television and printed science fiction have very little in common.

— George H. Scithers

Dear George:

It was excellent to receive my latest *Amazing®* this morning and find you had published my letter regarding Darrell Schweitzer's November '83 "Observatory" column on the lack of internationalism in SF.

I found your response characteristically apt and forthright. And it was invigorating as well to learn how *Amazing®* endeavors to publish non-American SF. To look at the other side of the coin, *Foundation* (out of London) strikes me as a fine, non-pretentious, non-academic example of what a critical magazine can do in this area. You know the old saying "Love knows no borders" — why shouldn't this be true of SF as well?

And yet, to emphasize the difficulties of trans-Atlantic communication, did you notice that my name was misspelled as Deam in *Amazing®*?

Yours,
John Dean
Paris, France

Darrell Schweitzer receives junk mail addressed to "Durnell Schweitzen," and we have encountered variants of our name all the way down to "Jeremy Slithers," all from domestic sources, so it seems that typographical mutilation of names knows no borders, either. But still, we apologize. As for international SF, the international showing in Amazing® *can only be as strong as the submissions we receive, so we hope that foreign writers will send us material. We think our readers would like to see some of it.*

— George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

Howard Browne's piece in the May *Amazing®* was fascinating. I well remember that Shaver Mystery rubbish — it was what caused me to stop reading *Amazing®*. Though very young at the time, I wasn't ingenuous enough to believe in deros, and that was what seemed to be expected of readers.

That whole business, in fact, left me with so bad a taste that I only started reading *Amazing®* again a couple of months ago. Much too long a hiatus, I now can see.

I've received your *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy* booklet, and this seems enormously helpful — it answers just about every question I've ever had about submitting stories, and a few I wouldn't have though of. My sincere thanks for this.

I have one little bone to pick with you (even if you do buy ink by the barrel) about a regular practice in *Amazing®* — the capitalization of the word *hell*. At first I assumed this to be some individual writer's quirk; but after a couple of issues it's become clear that whenever *hell* appears, in a story, article or letter, someone in your organization feels compelled to make a proper noun out of it — or else every single contributor just happens to be given to this curious aberration. It ain't proper usage, you know; it ain't even when the reference is literally to the abode of the damned, which is rarely if ever the case.

Likewise, *goddamned* becomes *God-damned* in *Amazing®*. Somebody there have some sort of a religious thing?

This is a minor, perhaps fussy,

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complaint about a magazine I like quite a lot.

Yours very truly,
Neil Harrington
Middletown CT

Well, perhaps we do tend to capitalize too often. However, it seems to us that Heaven is a specific place, as usually used; and to avoid any impression of bias, should we not treat Hell the same way? We also generally capitalize Earth, Moon, Sun, *and* Galaxy *when referring to the specific local ones, to be consistent with* Mercury, Venus, *and so on. And as for capitalizing* Heaven *and* Hell *in oaths and curses — well, let's not trivialize expletives to the point where they're no longer emphatic.*

Please note that letters to the editor may be sent to the Lake Geneva address (P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147-0110), where they may be read by the staff there before being forwarded to the rest of us here in Philadelphia. Manuscripts will also be forwarded from Lake Geneva, but for quicker service, you may send them direct to us at P.O. Box 8243, Philadelphia PA 19101-8243. (If this is not a current *issue of the magazine, please check a recent issue to be sure that the Philadelphia address is still current; we're having a lot of fun editing* Amazing®, *we hope to continue doing so for a long time — but we hope even more that we'll find a suitable replacement before we lose our editorial acumen or our enthusiasm.)*

— George H. Scithers



Well, yes; we *are* looking for stories, and from people who have never sold a story before as well as from long-time professionals. But no; we do not want to see you make the same mistakes, over and over again. So; we wrote and printed an 11,000 word booklet, *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy*, to help you with manuscript format, cover letters, return envelopes, and other details of story submission, along with some ideas on Plot, Background, Characterization, and Invention. These cost us two dollars each, with mailing and handling; we'd appreciate receiving this amount (check or money order, please; it's never wise to send cash through the mail). If you want two copies, send us $2.50; three copies, $3.00; and so on: in other words, 50¢ for each *additional* copy after the first one, which is $2.00. If you subscribe to **Amazing®** Science Fiction Stories today, we'll send you a copy of the booklet free.

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ONE FINAL DRAGON

by Larry Walker
art: Alex Schomburg



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"You'd be here for the dragon, then," said the old man. It was getting dark, and I couldn't make out exactly where on the riverbank his voice was coming from. He sounded as if he was chewing on something large and adhesive. "It's always the dragon," he said.

I pitched my bundle (all my clothes knotted around my sword) onto the bank and heaved up onto the cool stones, my back twitching with exertion and autumn chill.

"One time there was a ferry here," the unseen old man continued. "I'll tell you what happened to it if you like. One night the ferryman brought across a woman dressed in black. When they got to this side he saw that she was the Plague Maiden. He said, 'If I had known who you were, I'd have never brought you over, but since I have, surely you'll repay me by sparing my life.' And the woman said, 'You'll have your reward all right — a quick death.' And he fell down dead. And that was the end of the ferry service hereabouts. Not that there was anybody left to use it anyway. The ferryman's skull is still here someplace. I could find it and show it to you."

I dragged myself onto my feet and shook like a dog, then unwound my cloak and used it for a towel. It was gray Iceland *wadmal*, rough and warm. I said, "I've heard that same story about ferries in five different districts of Norway." I started dressing.

"Wonderful how that girl got around, isn't it?" said the old man. I thought I could make him out in the gloom now, squatting on a rock up above. "Five, you say. That comes after four and before . . . six."

I pulled on my boots, buckled my swordbelt, shook out the cloak and put it on. I then pulled on a long-tailed hood of the same stuff. Warm again, I spoke.

"My name is Bragi Sunnesson," I said. "I need to find the farmstead of Ormsli before nightfall."

"Follow me," said the old man, straightening up so I could see him. He didn't have far to straighten, being built for close communion with the earth. The evidence of that communion was spread pretty thickly on him. He carried a heavy belly that drooped over his rope belt. "I am the master of Ormsli," he said.

"*You're* the master?" I asked.

He drew himself up and said, "There is none greater than I for miles about." Then he grinned. He had black teeth, and few of them. "There is none *but* I for miles about. And I'd know if there were. I can count."

"You're the only Plague survivor?"

"The bitch never touched me. I just don't attract women. Heaven knows why."

I said, "I must beg your hospitality."

"Come along. We'll talk about the dragon." He turned and disappeared up the slope.

I followed. "You know where I can find the dragon?" I asked.

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He reappeared at a turning of the path above. "What did you say?" he asked.

I picked up my pace. "The dragon!" I cried.

"What dragon?" He disappeared again.

I cursed him and followed up the mountain, into the tall spruce and pine.

We'd crossed the timberline into birch and heather before we stopped. I'm an old campaigner, long-boned and enduring, but I was pretty nearly spent when he led me into the derelict farmstead. By the thin light of the setting sun I saw a few ruined outbuildings — byre and smithy and slaves' quarters, scattered around a hall. A few browsing goats raised their heads and surveyed us without alarm. The hall itself was ancient, built in an old style of upright posts and wattle-and-daub. Its thatch roof had collapsed here and there. The old man opened a door near one end and beckoned me in with an exaggerated gesture. I found myself alone in a foul entry chamber full of cobwebs and goat stink. I turned and pushed into the main hall, which was just as filthy but not so cramped. It was a relic of the Viking days, with the old-fashioned low ledges running along both sides for walking and sitting on, leaving a kind of trench down the center where a small long-fire burned. There was an elaborate high seat midway down the left-hand wall, and a guest seat faced it on my right. I went and sat in the guest seat.

The old man appeared out of a door — probably the kitchen door — down at the far end. He was carrying a pair of cracked wooden bowls.

"Two bowls," he said. He counted them, "One, two. I'm an educated man." He handed one to me — I found goatcheese and whey in it — then scrambled into the high seat and ate with his fingers.

"Dig in," he said. "Wonderful stuff. What more does a man need?"

I'd seen shorter rations, and occasionally eaten them out of dirtier vessels. The cheese was surprisingly good.

When we'd finished, he licked his fingers and said, "Now you'll have to pay for your dinner with news. What year have we got to?"

"The year of our Lord, 1360," I said.

"Let's see — the Plague came when?"

"1349."

"How many years since? I'm an educated man, but I never learned my take-aways."

"It's about eleven years."

"Eleven! Eleven years I've been master of Ormsli."

"What about the dragon?"

"Hush," he said. "How are things with King Magnus?"

I swallowed my impatience, judging that the old goiter was best humored. "It's a bit complicated," I said. "We're united with Sweden for the time being. Magnus' son Haakon is King of Norway under his father — who is King of Norway and Sweden jointly. It's hard to explain . . ."

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He said, "I understand perfectly," in a guileless voice that made me want to wring his neck.

"We just fought a war with Denmark over the Skåne region," I continued. "I was there. We lost."

"You should have tried harder."

"I'll remember that next time."

He sat for a minute and pondered his new knowledge. At last he said, "How many fingers and toes do you have? Counting them all, I mean."

"Twenty," I said.

"Twenty!" he cried, jumping and wriggling. "That's the number! Twenty, twenty, twenty! I can count, you see. I'm an educated man and I can count on my fingers, up to ten. Or on my toes, up to ten. But I can't count them all together. But if I can remember twenty — well, then I'll have twenty, you know. Twenty. A wonderful number."

I agreed that it was a marvelous number and asked, "Now, what about the dragon?"

He put one of his (ten) fingers in his mouth and said, "What dragon?"

I swallowed my irritation like an unchewed dumpling and said, "The dragon you were talking about the first moment I saw you."

He dropped his head on his shoulder and looked at me sideways. "I'm just a crazy old man who tells stories," he said, "and a story is the only place you'll find a dragon nowadays. Between the hunting and the Plague, they just died out. Poof. Did you know dragons can get the Plague? They can, unless they're very careful. They have to use their fire to cleanse their caves, and they have to get proper exercise and watch who they eat."

"You seem to know a lot about dragons," I said.

"I know a lot of stories."

"I like stories. Tell me a story about the dragon at Ormsli."

The old eyes narrowed. "The master of Ormsli," he said.

"You told me about that."

He nodded horizontally, letting the finger pop out of his mouth.

"I heard a rumor in Uppsala," I told him. "I followed the rumor to Bergen. In Bergen they told me that somewhere in the Uplands there was a farm called Ormsli, back in the wastes where no one has lived since the Plague. They said that there a dragon sleeps on its hoard, old and knobbley and wicked, dreaming hot dreams of greed and running blood."

"Dragons tell wonderful stories."

"Tell me some."

"Men shouldn't have hunted the dragons so. They're wise and ancient creatures, and they know wonderful things. They know about the caves under the earth and the skies above, and all the dwellers in them. They know about dwarfs and giants and witches. They know the lands of Prester John, and Vinland beyond the sea."

"What do they say about these things?"

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"She tells me —"

"She *tells* you?" I leaped to my feet.

"I didn't mean that." He shook himself upright, folded his arms, and began to whistle.

"You said, 'She *tells* me,' " I cried. "And you said, '*she*.' How did it get to be a she-dragon?"

"Half the dragons are she's."

"You said there weren't any dragons!"

"What do I know?"

I jumped across the fire-trench. He leaped too, but I caught him by the shirt. "You know the dragon, don't you?" I shouted. "You keep company with it! You listen to dragonish stories all day long and it's twisted your mind!"

"You're twisting my arm!" he whimpered.

"I'll bet you feed the dragon. You bring it goats to eat. That's why it lets you live!"

"There's no dragons in the real world. Everybody knows that."

"The real world is bung-full of all kinds of monsters."

He grinned at me and winked. "You shouldn't hunt dragons," he said. "Can you take a warning? Stay away."

"There is a dragon, then!"

"Can you muzzle the wild ox? Can you put a bit in its mouth and make it serve you?"

"Can you give me a simple answer?"

"You can't hunt dragons and simple answers, too. One or the other. Not both."

"I'm not interested in dragonish proverbs."

"Then you've come to the wrong place!" The old man gave a sudden wriggle and leaped like a spatter of hot grease for the entryway, leaving a piece of shirt in my hand. I followed him out.

Then I followed him up the mountain.

The night was black under a sliver of moon, but with the old man whooping and laughing as he ran ahead of me I had no trouble following. He led me up a steep and rugged incline, and I climbed until my lungs were bursting. If I'd had time to think I might have been more cautious, but I hadn't and I wasn't. I hardly noticed the smell of smoke until it had been in my nose for some time. Not wood smoke — this was more acrid, more like burning pitch. I found its source at last in a cave whose entrance glowed slightly beneath an overhang that projected like the upper lip of a weak-jawed man. A sound like a giant's bellows working came from somewhere inside. I approached, trying without success to move silently.

I had a moment of quiet clarity then, when all the things a large reptile can do to a man unrolled in my mind like a tapestry, rich in color and texture. But I shook my head and turned my thoughts to a memory.

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There had been a night in a tent on some battleground, a cold night long ago full of the stench of soaked wool and a bitter wind that moaned like a thing beaten.

I had been sitting huddled in the mud with old Hans and some fellow my own age who didn't live long enough after to leave much impression.

"I killed a dragon myself once," old Hans said.

"All by yourself?" I asked, smiling as my teeth chattered.

"So I had help. That's nothing to be ashamed of. And what's this?" He fumbled in his shirt and came out with an object strung on a leather thong like an amulet. It looked like a horn from a bull.

"D'you ever see anything like that, you young piece of pig dropping? That's the smallest claw I could find on the carcass. And this ring" — he thrust forward a gnarled hand which bore a large, twisted gold ring on the index finger — "this is all I have left of the dragon's hoard."

"Where's the rest?"

"How much gold can you carry on your back? We took out what we could and went to hire a cart for the rest, but when we returned the cave was empty. I suppose another dragon came along and took the hoard for its own. Even the carcass was gone — God knows what became of that."

"How did you get in for the kill? Dragons breathe fire."

"Ah! That's the sport of the thing. Pay attention. You see, a dragon has to rear up and throw its head back — like this — to unleash its flame. At that moment it also spreads its wings. If you're very fast, and very cool-minded — and believe me, I was in those days — you can rush in and strike it in its weakest spot — just here." He indicated a point on his left breast, almost under the armpit. "Strike just there," he said. "Your blade slides in as if into butter and severs the great vein to the heart. Then get the hell away and give it time to die."

He sat silent for a moment. Then he said, "Of course all the dragons are gone now. A pity, that."

The story had burrowed like a worm in my mind through the years. Now, after the rout in Skåne, the shame and the panic, something naïve and necessary had gotten mislaid in my life. I wanted it back, because I'd seen my own death in its lack. When I heard of the Ormsli dragon I knew where to go to find it.

I drew my sword and, with care, walked to the cave.

"Come in," said a harsh voice with an odd accent. It sounded as if it came from far below. So there would be a drop-off ahead. I'd have to watch my step. I said nothing. Old Hans had told me one other thing that night: "Whatever you do, don't get into a discussion with it."

I edged in. The overhang was easily high enough for me to enter without stooping. The glowing I'd noticed seemed to come from far within. I moved forward.

Suddenly my feet were snatched from under me, and the world went fly-

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ing upward. My left hand grabbed uselessly for purchase; my right instinctively clutched my sword all the tighter. That's one of the few things experience has taught me.

I fetched up hard at the foot of a kind of stone slipway coated with what seemed to be animal fat — probably goat.

Stunned, I got to my feet in a vaulted chamber lit from no obvious source. The glow might have come from the mountainous pile of shining things before me. Or it might have come from the dragon that sprawled atop it, making it look modest in size.

I wasn't prepared for the sheer magnitude of the thing. Size itself seemed to club me like a hammer blow to the stomach. She loomed like a universe of her own, a black constellation of scales and knobs and claws and ballooning fat belly-flesh. Her bat-wings swathed her like a leather cloak, and yellow, sour smoke rose from her nostrils.

I blinked at the hoard. Vision danced over silver and gold, gems and wonders from a craftsman's fantasy.

At this point I remembered my danger and all but lost the old man's cheese and whey. I raised my guard, but the dragon hadn't moved.

"You can't imagine how happy I am to have a visitor," she rasped. "I'm fond of the old man here, but he can be tiresome in large quantities." With a wave of her wing she indicated the old man, crouched now on a ledge up on my right, grinning and chewing.

"How do?" the fellow said. "Here's where I got my education."

I said nothing. I noticed that my left hand was thickly coated with goat fat. I wiped it on my breeches, which didn't help, since my breeches were just as greasy.

"He's not talking," the old man observed.

"Someone probably warned him not to," the dragon replied. "They told him, 'Whatever you do, don't get into a discussion with a dragon.' Am I correct, yellow-beard?"

The yellow beard was mine, but I only stood there, tense and quiet. I had expected to get straight into the action. I grant that as it worked out that would have killed me, but I disliked having to wait for a first move from my quarry.

"Well he's nice to look at, anyway," the dragon continued, turning back to the old man. A kind of feminine lilt in the raspy voice made me uncomfortable. "If he won't say anything, at least he has the virtue of being decorative, with that long, strong body and golden beard. I'm fond of beautiful things. Like this belt." She picked a silver-plated belt from the hoard and held it up, dangling from a claw the size of a hunting horn. "Pretty thing, isn't it? Hammered work from Persia. This goes back, oh, three hundred years. I got it off a Swedish trading party in Russia back in my thieving days. Those old Vikings could put up a fight, I'll tell you. I had great sport then. *Sic transit gloria.*"

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I thought, *I've lost my mind. I'm standing here listening to a dragon. If this goes on I'll be just like that old man.* I needed to make something happen.

I leaped, sword swinging in both hands. The dragon casually extended one clawed wing and bowled me over backward, head over tail like a puppy. I came up again quickly, sword at the ready, only to slip on a patch of goat-grease and land on my seat again. I got up hunched and angry. I had to will my right hand to relax on the sword-grip a bit. It was going numb.

The dragon sat and studied me for a moment, her horse-head oscillating at the end of her curved neck like something disembodied. Finally she swung it toward the old man. "He's a stone," she said. "Not a peep from him."

"He's a wonderful canny one, he is," the old man agreed.

She shrugged her wings. "Well, shall we try our lesson?" she asked. She held up three claws. "How many fingers?"

"Four?"

"Close. Try again. Count them one at a time."

This went on for a few minutes.

"He never makes any progress," she told me when it was over. "His memory is moth-eaten, and he has no concentration at all. Still, it passes the time and gives us a shared activity."

She sighed with a sound like the frying of a hundred thousand sausages. "Have you ever considered," she asked, "how deadly dull it would be to guard a treasure for 600 years? If anyone ever tells you that money isn't everything, you can tell them from me that they know what they're talking about. In fact, when you think of it, nothing is everything." She seemed to fall into a revery then, and I tried to think of a way to get her mad enough to take offensive action. Would calling her names do it?

"Can you write?" she asked suddenly. "Still not speaking, eh? Well in any case, I've been considering finding someone who could do a history of art for me. I have all the source material here — gold and silver work from every country in the world, illuminated books from Ireland and France, armor-work and tapestries from Italy — even porcelain from Cathay.

"I've rearranged my hoard a hundred times — by material, by period, by country of origin — even by size and price and subject matter depicted. I'm probably the world's foremost authority, and that implies a certain academic responsibility, don't you think?"

I said nothing and she scratched her snout. "All right, be that way," she said, blinking. "I've also composed a 28,000-stanza epic poem on the career of a great dragon of the elder days whose name would mean nothing to you. No human has patience enough to sit through it, though, even if they could understand the language; and I don't have any dragons to recite it to. Extinction, like everything else, is a great waste of time.

"I could get upset about it, I suppose, and go out and devastate countrysides, but what would be the point?

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"Speak to me, yellow-beard," she rasped, fixing me with saurian but liquid eyes. "Tell me what you've come for. Did you come for treasure, or did you come to be a hero? If it's just the treasure, we could probably come to an arrangement of some kind and part as friends.

"Can I be frank with you? I'm no longer a young dragon. I suppose I've simply lost my taste for a fight. I could kill you — Heaven knows I've done that sort of thing before — but I ask myself, what would be the gain? A meal, granted, but my taste runs more to goats nowadays. And lately I've had a strong sense of the futility of all earthly endeavors. When you're my age, which you never will be, you'll realize that nothing's really worth the trouble. I've never devoured a man or a woman without thinking that, could they but know it, I was doing them a favor.

"I'm the last dragon, you know. In all the world it's me alone, then hey-ho for the bestiaries."

"I can count to one," the old man volunteered.

"Of course that's my peculiar charm for the adventurer, isn't it?" the dragon continued. "If you want to be a Worm-slayer, I'm your last chance. After hundreds of years of the greatest blood-sport in the world, one prize remains for one last, lucky hero. But think — have you really pondered the responsibility?

"We're fellow-pilgrims, you and I — Man and Dragon have ridden the same horse these many years. We've had our differences, to be sure, but we've required one another for all that. You've provided treasure and protein for us and we've given you profit (not without honor), sport, and a convenient symbol for Evil Incarnate. And now you come, sword in hand, to say, 'The ride ends here.' Do you really think you have the right?"

"One is the second number," said the old man.

"No it isn't!" I found myself saying. Then I bit my tongue. I swear I didn't mean to speak, but I was trying to think and he was irritating me.

" 'Tis so," the old man answered. "The first number is nothing."

"You have a voice after all!" said the dragon. Dragons can't smile, but a smile seemed to be the idea. "Welcome to the conversation."

I only scowled and cursed myself inwardly.

She brought her head forward, radiating heat that had me sweating. "One final dragon," she almost whispered. "Shouldn't there be one final dragon somewhere? It's not as if I were burning villages and devouring virgins at present. I dwell far from human habitations, and I don't see how I'll be a threat to anyone in your lifetime. Would you eat your seedgrain or butcher your stud bull? Of course not — you don't want to end the line. Think how much human adventure I'd take with me if I went. What but a dragon can a man slay with a really clean conscience? Life's a pretty bland banquet without some spice of evil after all. Don't you agree?"

I felt power in the great yellow eyes. It was a power new to me — a power of pain and ancient despair.

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Her claw stretched forward; the silver belt gleamed before my eyes. "Take this," she said. "Take it as a token and enter my service. Do you seek honor? Take glory instead. I'll make you the Knight of the Dragon."

My heart pounded as I reached out to receive the belt with my free left hand. I had seen the thing I had come for in those lizard eyes. I knew what I must do.

The claw withdrew, clasped a jeweled golden chalice, and reached out to me again. "Take this too, and be my friend," the dragon said. "Friendship is a transaction." I took it and stuffed it under my arm.

"You'll live in the hall and be my protector," said the great beast. "I'll give you gifts and teach you forbidden secrets. Then I'll send you on adventures, and you'll fetch more treasure, and we'll divide the profits. You'll live like a king and be the greatest knight in the world, and to Hell with what anybody thinks. Agreed?"

"You offer me all I need," I said.

"Me too," said the old man, head wagging.

"Then go in peace, friend," said the dragon.

I turned my back.

It happened just as I expected.

At the first sound of stretching membrane and clattering treasure I dropped my baubles and turned back with my sword.

Old Hans had known what he was talking about.

I nearly got crushed in her final convulsions. But when it was over I climbed the golden pile and contemplated my handiwork.

My dragon. The smoke of her blood stung my eyes.

I noticed that the old man still crouched on his perch. I spoke to him for lack of a better audience.

"She was right about one thing," I said. "It does trouble me to have taken the last dragon."

"Don't worry about it," he said, grinning and unconcerned. "Everybody knows — dragons are wonderful liars."

This is Larry Walker's first fiction sale. He has been studying Norwegian, for reasons he will not reveal to us. Can there be dragons left in the remoter reaches of Scandinavia?



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MEDIUM

by Joel Henry Sherman

art: Stephen Fabian



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He was afraid.

Haro Mott stood in the heat and felt the uncertainty flooding him once more. He was alone between the shuttle and the terminal with his bag clutched tightly in one hand, a sultry breeze stirring his short hair. No one noticed or greeted him. He could return to the silver craft, lift back into space, and be safe. No one could force him to stay.

Yet . . . he was a Medium. Haro shrugged off the feeling and walked to the glass terminal, heat waves swirling on the pavement before him.

A man sat in the shadow of the wall, his features hidden, his clothing faded and tattered. Familiarity caused Haro to turn and look closer.

"Hello, Haro," the man said, face still cloaked in shade.

"Hello," Haro answered hesitantly.

"Don't you recognize me, Straights?" The man looked up, face coming into the light. His scalp was shaved, face lean and gaunt, smile disarming. "Surely you remember Yellowman?"

Memory added thirty pounds to the frame, cloaked head and face with thick, dark hair, filled the hollows in the cheeks. "Hello, Yellowman."

"What brings you to Waxter?" The lanky man stood and stretched, his body painfully thin.

"What brings a Medium to any planet . . . trouble." Haro shifted levels. The man was making no effort to mask. His features were painted with emotions. There was cynicism in the cast of the lips. Sorrow traced the angle of the eyebrows. Subtle antagonism tainted the quick voice. He smelled fear. "It has been a long time, Yellowman. I heard you left the service."

"We all have our calling, Straights. I was tired. So tired of being the Judas." The man narrowed his own gaze. Haro sensed him changing levels, felt himself being subliminally read. The habits of a Medium died hard. "Rumor said you would not be out again. Not after Rovana 3. It was whispered you had turned to pax. A hard mistress . . . pax. I am surprised to see you here."

Haro grimaced with memory. "I have beaten the drug. I can do nothing about Rovana 3. But perhaps I can prevent such from occurring again." He shrugged. "I am a Medium and I have been summoned to this place."

Yellowman shook his head sadly. "Do the Judas dance, Straights. Make the natives nice." He looked toward the rest of the island rising behind them, a monolith of black stone and green jungle. "Let's not leave paradise alone too long." He laughed sarcastically.

"It's not paradise yet, Yellowman. But maybe I can help to make it so."

"Do you really believe that?"

Haro paused. "I have to believe in something."

"Then good luck, Haro."

"Thanks."

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The man turned and made his sinuous way out onto the shuttle field. A woman was waiting for him in the heat. She smiled and hugged Yellow-man when they met, and they walked away together until the heat waves merged their silhouettes.

His reception consisted of a single Wormat. More than a meter and a half in height, the creature towered over Haro. Its elongated head had a jutting jaw and prominent snout. Short, dark hair curled up the back and neck, spreading over the face. Two curled tusks thrust from the lower jaw. The massive chest was hairless, skin the color of aged leather. Two tree-trunk legs extended from a brightly-colored pair of shorts. The creature studied him cautiously before approaching.

"Are you Mott?" the Wormat growled.

"Yes," Haro nodded. He shifted modes unconsciously and read a strange mixture of emotions — apprehension, relief, and disappointment.

"Welcome to Waxter." The Wormat reached down and took his bag easily. "I'm to take you to the Commissioner."

"Fine."

"I'm called Wind-From-Glowing-Lake, but you can just call me Glow. If you'd follow me."

"Got it." Outside, beyond the shaded porch and a small patch of grass, an electric cart waited on the narrow road. The Wormat tossed the bag into the back and awkwardly folded its legs into the front. Haro slid in beside the creature. The cart lurched forward with a soft whine.

Mott sat in silence as they proceeded up the twisting road, past glass domes like stranded soap bubbles and fields strangely green and vibrant against the shining sand and black rocks. Waxter was eighty-five percent water. What dry ground existed was a crescent of harsh volcanic islands. Most life was in the sea.

Turning as the cart rolled past a high vista, Mott could see the ocean, deep-blue, rippled with waves. There was a spreading forest of Titmotu, tree-like growths which thrust thick, fleshy trunks from the sea bottom to eventually pierce the surface and spread dense green leaves into the sky.

He was struck by the pervading sense of peace in the surroundings. Yet he knew it was an illusion, for if true peace existed, he would never have been called.

Haro welcomed the air-conditioned chill of the office complex. Glow escorted him through quiet halls and corridors, softly carpeted, accented with wood and gleaming steel. The Commissioner's suite was at the top of the domed building. Clear glass, opaqued slightly to cut the glare of morning, offered a spectacular view on three sides. The island peak was on the right, a stark finger of obsidian. Opposite, the island dropped away in a series of canyons and cliffs which plunged to the sea.

The office was spartanly furnished — a simple desk, several chairs arranged around a low table. The left-hand wall of the room was a sheer

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wall of glass, a divider for a second chamber. The adjoining office was filled with fluid, an aquarium. He had seen such rooms before, most recently on Rovana 3. A Lantian floated inside, saucer eyes studying his. The soft, pentagonal body radiated hate.

Mott shuddered slightly and turned to the Commissioner.

Commissioner Adrianne Karpel rose from behind her desk and extended one hand. Haro was assaulted by the tension in her posture. Her fear, anger, and disgust could not escape his trained gaze. She was a large woman, slightly under 180 centimeters in height. Her shoulders were broad and square. Blonde hair capped her skull in a pageboy. Her blue eyes measured him and evidently found him lacking.

"Mr. Mott. I'm Adrianne Karpel." A nod indicated the Lantian. "Deputy Commissioner Onam. You've already met Glow. Please, sit and be comfortable."

"Excuse my noticing," he said carefully as he took a seat. "But that is part of my job. I seem to be a disappointment to all of you. You did request a Medium, did you not?"

"Yes," Karpel took a deep breath. "But I'm afraid your reputation has preceded you. I had hopes of avoiding a violent confrontation here on Waxter. The need is urgent. But obviously the Authority does not feel that we merit one of their best operatives."

"You fear another slaughter like that on Rovana 3?"

"Yes," she said honestly. "And I can have a slaughter without your involvement."

Haro stared at her over the tips of his touching fingers. "Do you think I want to see another war?" He did not wait for an answer. "Of course not. I am a fully accredited Medium. I can communicate in twelve modes, speak fourteen alien tongues and ten old Earth languages as well. I am one of the best. In the opinion of the Authority, I am the best suited for this situation." He only hoped they were right in their judgment. "But if you feel my services aren't required, then I'll be leaving." He stood and straightened his jumpsuit.

"No offense intended," the Commissioner said. "It's just that the situation is getting out of control. I don't like that feeling, or the feeling that I'm not getting support from the Authority. But . . . I suppose every colony feels it's being ignored."

"That's been my experience," Haro said, smiling slightly. "I have some background concerning your problem. I believe it involves the Ati?"

"The locals call them 'skaters'. The problem is simple. Despite the creatures' obvious intelligence, they refuse to communicate with us. Communication is vital to our peaceful coexistence."

"Is it?"

"Believe me," she said quickly. "We'd ignore them if we could. But the

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Ati won't ignore us. If we put a boat in the water, they might sink it. If we drag our nets, there is a possibility they will tear them to shreds. If we build floating structures, the Ati may decide to destroy them."

"They don't attack everything put in the water?"

"No." She rested her elbows on the desktop. "That only compounds the problems. Random conditioning is the worst type. If they were at least consistent, destroying everything, at least we would know what to expect. But this?" The woman arched her eyebrows. "First of all, you've got to understand that we are a private colony. We've invested everything we have into this place. We didn't come to Waxter to get rich, just to control our own destinies. As fisherfolk, we only want a place to drag our nets and feed our people. But we can't do that, not consistently, because the skaters destroy nets and ships. It's causing a panic."

"I'll do what I can."

Anger flashed in her eyes, quickly controlled. "You'll have to do better than try, for the Ati and us. If we can't supply our food by fishing, then it has to be shipped in at tremendous cost by stellar transport. We can't afford it much longer. If something doesn't get through to the skaters, I can't be responsible for what happens." There was desperation in her face.

"Do I have to spell it out for you?" She chewed her lips. "If we can't find some method of coexistence with the Ati, then we'll have to abandon this rock. There's not enough money to start somewhere else. We'll have to sell ourselves to the colonization companies, breaking up friends and families. No one wants that. There's been some talk about another method. We have a sizable Lantian population, and they've convinced some that the Ati could be eliminated. The idea is gaining popularity daily."

"Genocide is frowned upon by the Authority," Mott said evenly.

She laughed. "Hell, on Waxter *I* am the Authority. So either you solve this problem, or the skaters face slaughter. You, of all people, should know how efficient the Lantians can be."

"Yes," Haro answered softly, for an instant surrounded by the dead on Rovana 3, Lantian hoppers searing the green sky with energy blasts. "How much time can you give me?"

Karpel shrugged. "Councilday is seven days away. We'll meet to order the next food shipment. That cost will probably drive enough over to the genocide faction to give them a majority vote. Then it will be out of my hands."

"All right." Haro nodded. "I'd better get started. I'll need a comprehensive list of all the communication methods used up to this point. I'll also need all available information on the Ati — holos, films, recordings, books — whatever you have."

"Anything you want is yours. Just ask Glow and it will be found for

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you."

"Thank you, Commissioner." Haro bowed slightly. "Deputy Commissioner." He glanced toward the tank where the gelatinous Lantian watched him motionlessly. The hatred in the huge eyes was even more intense. He wondered at it briefly, but could not connect the name Onam with anyone on Rovana 3. "If I could be shown to my quarters, I would like to freshen up for a moment. Then perhaps Glow would take me out to look at the Ati."

"As you wish," Glow said. The Wormat opened the door and they left the office. Haro felt the cold gaze of the Lantian on his back. The caress of those black eyes caused waves of nausea to sweep through him.

His room was comfortable and sterile, much like a thousand rooms he had occupied while on other calls. Most colonies were austere and Waxter was no exception. There was a small bed, combination desk and nightstand, a cramped bathroom, and a full-length window which offered a view of the endless ocean.

A plain wrapped package lay on the nightstand. He shook it briefly, gained no clues to the contents, searched for a note, found nothing, and so peeled back the crisp paper. Inside was a small leather kit, and he knew the contents even before opening the magnetic seal. The syringe sparkled like a sliver of crystal. Seven needles were long and wicked through the plastic cocoons which sealed them for sterility. The short length of rubber tourniquet made a serpentine coil in his hand.

He counted the amber vials slowly, holding each glass packet in his hand until they grew warm to the touch. There were seven, enough pax to send him up for a week and never touch down. Haro broke the seal on one, gathering an amber droplet on his fingertip. The bitter smell of the drug flooded the room. A slight flashback flared within him, briefly intense. For an instant, he was somewhere, and it was more beautiful than he remembered.

In fear, Haro lurched up from the bed. Sweat beaded his forehead, making his face slick and cool. He staggered into the bathroom, startled by his own pale features in the mirror. His hands trembled as he dropped the vials into the toilet and flushed them away in a rush of gurgling water. He stood at the toilet for a long time.

Seven vials of pax . . . enough to keep him occupied until long after councilday. He laughed bitterly, thinking of how disappointed someone would be at his decision.

The ride from the hotel to the beach was quiet, only the humming of the electric motor stirring the mid-day silence. A man and a woman were walking down the street in front of the cart. They shouldered packs, a pair of modified gravity grids dangling from each, small and unusual for their

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size. As the cart passed, the man turned to watch Haro sullenly. It was Yellowman. The pair was hidden behind a bend in the road before he had the chance to react.

"Tramps," Glow snorted.

"What's that?"

The Wormat picked at a tusk. "Waxter attracts tramps looking for paradise. Loafing fools do nothing for the colonies. When we have better consolidated, we will drive them out."

"I gather they're not well liked." Haro said with a slight smile. The Wormat laughed dryly. They rode the rest of the way in silence.

The cart halted on a flat expanse of beach, black sand glittering. A tangle of meshed trees provided the only shelter from the steady light. The mossy trunks were cool and fragrant, and the spongy bark offered a good backrest. Haro took out his field glasses. Long lines of perfect breakers rolled up the shore. The sound lulled his senses.

"There they are," Glow said, pointing out to the far line of waves breaking in white froth against a distant reef. "A group of them, at least. See why we call them skaters?"

Mott squinted into the glare. He could see a group of figures on the horizon. They appeared to be dancing over the surface of the water.

His field glasses brought the Ati close enough to distinguish details. The creatures were humanoid in body shape, but the resemblance quickly faded. They had six limbs — two delicate upper arms and four sturdier legs. Their heads were long and conically shaped. The total physical portrait was fragile, appendages stepping gracefully as the beings slid over the rippling surface.

"How do they do that?" he asked quietly.

Glow grunted and pulled on a tusk. "They've got a very light skeletal structure, like a bird. Porous bones with lots of air in them. If you get close enough, you can see that the four support limbs have round, webbed feet nearly fifty centimeters in diameter. Combine all that with Waxter's light gravity, and the skaters can walk on water."

"But I thought the Ati lived mainly under the surface."

"They do. Deep dwellers in fact. An elaborate internal system of pumps and bladders allows them to sink or float at will." Glow rose to a sitting position. "They sure make it look easy, don't they?"

"Certainly do."

"Well," Glow looked at him expectantly. "What's the next move?"

Haro lowered the glasses. "We watch, Glow. We watch and study and experiment . . . and maybe we pray a little. I just hope we have enough time."

Glow grunted and scratched his furred chin.

When he finally returned to his room late in the afternoon, there was

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another packet of vials waiting on the nightstand. It was almost an hour before he could force himself to take the trip to the bathroom. He only found strength enough to drop six of the seven into the water and flush the toilet.

The seventh he placed in the kit and slid it between the mattress and the pillow on his bed.

Haro spent the evening in deep study, watching films, reading, absorbing the Ati. The creatures had first been catalogued by a bio-team almost four years after the initial discovery of Waxter. Their obvious intelligence and thriving civilization attracted attention, yet their lack of technology and seeming disinterest had made them almost immediately a low priority life contact and they were deserted for better and more profitable contacts on a hundred other planets. Bio-teams were in heavy demand. Haro knew the philosophy of the Authority too well to be surprised by the action of the first teams.

Before the biologists departed, they made a thorough sweep of the Ati, deciphering both their verbal and written languages. Though Haro could not produce Ati vocal sounds, a standard translation device could be modified to do the job. Their written language was more difficult, with over four hundred characters and a jumbled tangle of syntax, gender, and person. But by morning of his second day of study, he was already writing simple sentences.

The colonists had come later, once the Authority had determined that Waxter offered little to a government outpost. The planet was sold for a price which reimbursed the Authority for their original investment of time and effort. The colonists quickly realized the potential of the Ati as assets to a fishing colony. Their attempts at communication were thorough and had even been filmed for future reference.

Haro studied the films and found to his surprise they only confused the problem further. The colonists had used signs, translation devices, pictograms, lights, color, song, dance, pheromones . . . a broad gambit of available devices. Yet each film recorded the same response from the Ati — an almost autistic reaction.

At first, the creatures watched curiously, but over a short period of time the interest faded. They made no attempt to respond. Maddeningly, they soon failed even to show curiosity. It was as if the novelty had worn away from a new toy. In the final clips, the beings did not even look in the direction of the communication teams. It was the response Haro would have given to insects.

After forty-eight hours of intense study, he was no closer to a solution than when he started. He was exhausted. His eyes burned and his head throbbed. Haro reached under the pillow and touched the pax kit. It felt cool and electric. The room was silent, as was the world outside. Even the sea had stilled its rumbling voice. For a long time, he could not move.

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His muscles finally relaxed, though drawing his hand from the pillow was like pulling free of a quagmire. He splashed his face with water, combed his hair, and stepped outside to get something to eat.

Night came leisurely to Waxter. Orange-tinted clouds held the twilight for an eternity, fading to violet and then a blackness lit by a thousand stars. When the moon rose, its light cast his shadow as Haro walked home from the commissary.

A gentle breeze brought the strong smell of the sea and stirred the Corpus trees arching over the walkway, whispering in the feathery blue-green leaves. He was deep in thought and almost failed to hear the soft hiss behind him — the release of pressure from an environmental suit.

Haro sensed the blow and rolled down and to the left, twisting quickly to bring his legs up, delivering a savage kick. The Lantian had counted on surprise and swung the metal staff too high, striking a Corpus tree, steel ringing. Trapped in the sealed suit filled with heavy liquid, the creature was slow. Haro kicked hard, driving the Lantian backward. The creature hit a tree trunk and spun, sprawling into the path. The sealed helmet exploded on impact, spraying the air with pressurized fluids.

Haro scrambled to his feet and checked the Lantian. It was beyond help, dead or quickly dying from internal rupture due to rapid pressure change. He scanned the area, detected no other presence, and hurried off to find Security. When they returned to the spot, the dead Lantian was gone. Only a faint drying puddle remained as proof.

Commissioner Karpel lived in a modestly-furnished apartment with the standard vista of the moon-drenched sea. Mott sat on the couch, sipping whiskey to calm his nerves. His hands were still shaking. Glow sat on the floor, picking at his yellowed claws.

"You're certain it was a Lantian?" Adrianne asked, her face drawn.

"Positive." Haro took another stiff drink. "No mistaking that." He shifted modes, looking for anything suspicious, but read nothing except genuine fear and concern in both of them. No enemy here, unless they had been well trained in masking.

"Too bad they took the corpse," Glow growled. "We could have used some proof."

"Definitely." The Commissioner slid back in her seat. "We can't make any accusations without physical evidence. But it does make sense. It's been obvious for some time that the Lantians want control of Waxter. If they help eliminate the skaters, they can command their price. Hell, we'd all end up as hired help for the Lants. But I never thought they'd attempt murder."

"I think I eliminated their options." Haro sighed. "Since my arrival, someone has been stocking my room with pax."

Silence lengthened in the room.

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"How?" Adrianne leaned forward in her chair.

"I don't know. They are replaced when I'm out. It's no secret I've had trouble with pax. Someone hoped to capitalize on my weakness. So far . . . I have disappointed them. They decided I'd have to die."

"Without the body, there's no proof." Glow rumbled.

"I doubt the body will ever be found. The Lantians have a way of making things vanish." Adrianne looked at him worriedly. "They will try again."

Mott clenched his teeth. "I'll be more careful in the future."

Glow narrowed his eyes until they were only slits of fire. "So will I."

Two more days passed without incident. The Wormat never let Haro out of sight and began arming himself with knife and stunner. The offerings of pax ceased, perhaps because of the guard stationed outside his room.

No progress was made with the Ati. His own attempts at reaching them were no more successful than the others. They watched with even less interest than they had shown the colonists and failed to acknowledge his presence at all.

Rovana 3 rose bloodily in his dreams, visions of the dead and dying, keeping him from sleep. More than once his hand sought the packet under his pillow and he would rise to a sitting position, knowing blissful peace was only an injection away. Yet he somehow stayed his hand and faced his dreams alone.

The morning of the fifth day dawned with ruddy clouds on the horizon. The breeze was strong, pushing mist against him and chilling him for the first time since he had come to Waxter. He leaned over the edge of the skimmer to catch the spray. Glow was at the helm, guiding the craft easily over the swells.

On the horizon, the Titmotu grove thrust thick branches and leaves into the sky. To the left of the trees, a last, lone atoll pierced the waves, shining like a black glass tower in the dawn, dotted with sparse vegetation.

Five hundred meters from the grove, Glow cut the engines. Silence reigned except for the clink of the cooling exhaust and soft lapping of the waves.

"We'll drift in from here," Glow said quietly. "The currents will carry us. I don't wish to disturb the skaters with our motors. It will make our survival odds better."

"You did not have to come." Haro looked at the Wormat.

"Believe me. I know that better than you."

They drifted without speaking. Haro stayed in the bow, watching for signs of the Ati. A few skimmed the water near them but made no hostile motions, looked up briefly with seeming interest, and swam away into the

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trees.

Thirty minutes passed as the morning grew brighter and the wind freshened. The sky showed signs of storm. They drifted toward the convergence of the grove and island, as the roar of the waves on the beach rose. The Ati ignored them. Haro noted a growing number of the beings gathering at the edge of the grove closest to the island. Through his glasses, he could see thirty of the skaters on the surface of the waves, spiraling in an intricate pattern.

They were not alone. Two other figures were coming in from the island, too distant to see clearly even with the binoculars, but gaining detail as they closed.

A whine grew in the south from the direction of the main colony. Rotors popping, a hopper came toward their craft, flying low over the waves.

"Company," Glow said, waving at the approaching craft.

"Not now," Haro snapped. "I've got something over here. Don't let that damn hopper scatter them."

"I'll try." Glow turned to the communication link.

The mass of the Ati began moving away from the sheltering grove of Titmotu. The pattern gathered strays and gained complexity, spreading until it enveloped the figures approaching from the small atoll. Haro could not follow the intruders because they had become part of the dance, weaving in formation. But Haro was certain they were not Ati.

"I can't raise the hopper." Glow muttered. "Let me have the glasses."

"Not now."

"But . . . damn!" The Wormat swore and slammed his hand onto Haro's shoulder. "Jump!"

"What?" Haro turned in time to see a flare from the hopper and hear the pop of rushing energy.

"Lantians. Jump now!"

Then they were tumbling from the side of the skimmer. The explosion tore the ship into fragments, spewing a huge gout of debris-flecked water as the cold sea swallowed them.

He was awakened by the first light of dawn filtering through a thatched roof. The sand was soft and conformed to his back. A chill tinged the air. He smelled the tang of salt and the pungency of woodsmoke, punctuated by an aroma of roasting fish. His chest and arms ached as he rose to a sitting position.

The man sitting near him turned at his movement. "Hello, Haro."

"Hello, Yellowman."

"How do you feel?"

"Sore and hungry, but I'll live. How's Glow?"

"The Wormat is fine . . . very anxious to get his hands on some

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Lantians." Yellowman squatted and rocked back on his heels. His shorts were ragged, his skin deeply tanned. Haro shifted modes but could detect nothing in the expressionless face.

"How long have I been out?"

"About twenty hours."

Haro did not speak for a minute, watching the other man. "I saw you," he said finally. "Before the Lants attacked. I saw you with the Ati."

Yellowman stood slowly, still expressionless. "Come outside and eat." He exited through a leather-lashed door.

Outside the wind curled through the trees. A smell of steaming fish carried to his nostrils and caused the hunger in his stomach to burn. Glow, Yellowman, and the woman circled a crackling fire, stirring the coals and eating. Glow was devouring a slab of roasted fish. The woman smiled and handed him a leaf-wrapped meal when he approached.

"Eat," she commanded.

Haro nodded and unwrapped the meat. The steaming flesh was white and flakey with a taste far superior to anything he had eaten on Waxter. Juices dripped from his fingers and chin. He concentrated for a time on his food. When he had finished, Haro rubbed his hands with fine, black sand and rinsed them clean in the surf.

"I did see you," he said to Yellowman and the woman as he walked back to the fire. "I saw you on the water with the Ati. I did not imagine that."

"Yes," Yellowman said, his voice tired. "You saw us. I am sorry for that."

"Have you broken through to them? Can you communicate with them?"

The man did not answer and the woman turned away.

"Damn it! If you have reached them, there is still time to save the Ati." He glanced up to judge the hour. "But we must hurry."

"No." Yellowman snapped. "I will not do it. I am out of the service, Haro. Find the secret on your own." He could not conceal the disgust in his face. "You destroy them, I will not help you."

"Yellowman, there isn't enough time . . . not for me to break it. If you know how to reach them, tell me; or the Ati are lost." Haro grabbed him by the shoulders. "I don't give a damn about your philosophies. But I don't want Rovana 3 to happen again. Don't you see that?"

"I will not be a Judas!" Yellowman narrowed his eyes. "I've sold too many already."

"What choice remains? Either you join with me or the Lantians slaughter the Ati. Genocide, Yellowman. You'd be as guilty as the rest. If you are not part of the solution, you're part of the problem."

"I can't, Haro. I can't subdue another culture. I'm through with that life, Haro. I am through destroying innocents. The Ati don't need us.

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They don't need our wars or our colonists. They should be protected. We should leave them in peace. They mean nothing to us. Even the Authority has abandoned them as of no value."

"It's too late for that, Yellowman." Haro took a deep breath, feeling the other's pain. "It was too late for the Ati the day the first ship passed Waxter. They must either join or be destroyed. Those are the only alternatives." Haro swallowed hard, trying to steady his voice. "I have watched one culture die, Yellowman. Please don't make me witness a second."

Yellowman shook his head stubbornly and pulled away. "Haro, everywhere the Judas touches down, a culture dies. Everywhere." The man stalked down the beach.

The woman unwrapped another fish for Haro when he returned to the fire. He ate it mechanically, for his food had lost its flavor.

Yellowman seemed to appear from the sand. He made no sounds of approach. His shadow crossed Haro where he sat staring out to sea. Haro glanced up at him but found no message in the passive face.

"Damn you," Yellowman said quietly after a time. "Damn you and your message." He dropped a pair of gravity grids to the sand, small ones with straps for his feet. "Come. You must learn to be Ati. Do you know how to use these?"

"I'm not sure." Haro squinted up at him, eclipsed by the light.

"Can you swim?"

"Yes."

Yellowman laughed bitterly. "That, at least, is a start." He moved down the beach and into the tumbling water, Haro following uncertainly in his wake.

The morning of Councilday dawned bright and clear. The water was cool, waves steep. A fine salt spray washed his body, and though the morning was still young, the warmth was growing and the chilling water was welcome.

There were a few figures on the beach at the colony. Haro knew it would not take long to draw a crowd. The first to sight them stared in disbelief, then ran hollering up the sand. It did not take much time for others to come. They waited until Commissioner Karpel arrived, before he and Glow escorted the Ati in from the sea.

Haro found peace on the waves, dancing over the surface of the mirrored water. The grids strapped to his feet had already lost their sensation of confinement. They supported him beautifully, and he laughed when he thought of how it must appear to those on shore — a Human and a Wormat walking on water.

The Ati halted five meters from the beach, just behind the breakers, mewling softly as Haro and Glow continued into shore.

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"You're supposed to be dead," Adrianne Karpel said, smiling. "A search after your disappearance found the remains of a skimmer. It was believed that you and Glow were attacked by skaters. Your resurrection is going to disappoint some colonists."

"Lantians, no doubt." Haro smiled. "I think you'll find some were piloting a hopper. Check the hopper and you'll discover the energy charges have been recently fired. That should be enough proof for you. I'm sure Glow will testify."

"And the skaters?"

Haro nodded. "We have broken through. Lines of communication can be established."

"Thank God. How did you do it?"

Haro read respect in her features. Yet he did not feel proud. He felt strangely numb. "I had help. Someone taught me to be an Ati. The rest is easy. Our standard translator reproduces their language quite well."

She looked puzzled. "We tried communicators."

"You did not exist. You were not Ati."

"What?"

Haro brushed his hair back from his forehead. "When I was a child, one of my friends learned to stand on her head. Everyone in school tried to learn the trick. Those who did learn would not play with those that didn't. But we were children and we grew out of that game." Haro laughed with remembrance.

"The Ati have never grown up," he said, still smiling. "That is the best explanation. They are a very specialized animal, capable of walking on water. That's something nothing else in their world is able to do. Anything that cannot do the same is inferior — the way that we consider insects inferior. Consequently, ours were the actions of animals and were not worthy of attention."

"But what about our spacecraft, our boats and houses . . . surely they could see we were intelligent?"

Haro shrugged. "Certain ants build mounds, use tools, wage war, yet we do not consider them intelligent. It may not be logical to you, but it made sense to the Ati — that is what mattered."

"And the attacks?"

"Don't we exterminate those ants which trouble us, invade our homes? But do we kill all ants? Or only those which immediately threaten us? The Ati attacked that which they considered a direct threat. They had no wish to destroy us all." Haro looked out to the semi-circle of Ati and back to the woman. "That won't be a problem once you reach them. Since Glow and I have proven ourselves, we can't get them to leave us alone." He nodded toward the crescent of aliens on the water. "I predict a rapid growth in colonial population."

"Will they allow us to fish?"

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"They'll fish for you . . . better than you could do alone. They are the masters of the world. Treat them with respect and they will make Waxter very prosperous."

"So," the woman said, taking his arm. "What should we do first?"

"You'll have to begin with your instructor." He escorted her to where the Wormat was waiting, holding both pairs of grids. "Glow has proved a good pupil. He will be a good instructor. I'm leaving him in charge."

"You will not stay?"

He smiled blankly and shook his head. "No. You have no need of me anymore and there are others requiring my services. I must be going." He bowed slightly. "Goodbye, Commissioner."

"Thank you," she said, shaking his hand.

He slipped levels and read her emotions, admiration and respect. Clearly he had risen in all of their eyes, all eyes but his own.

The woman went with Glow out into the surf. Haro turned and made his way up the beach, through the growing knot of people gathering on the black sands, their awed voices a low murmur at his back. He turned only once to look back from the door of the hotel, out to the ocean to see the Ati a final time before the Humans reached them on the shining waves.

When he returned to his room, Haro Mott took one of his boots and smashed the pax kit into splinters.

The author is twenty-five, and was born and raised in various parts of California. He presently resides in Bakersfield, CA with his wife, Carolyn, and her three canaries. He graduated from California State University at Bakersfield with a BA in English and Communications, after which he held the usual variety of writer's jobs: ditch digger, urethane foam applicator, shoe salesman, clothing salesman, insurance salesman, safety consultant, etc. Presently he is employed by the Worker's Compensation Division of the State of California.

This is his first professional sale.



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The Observatory

by George H. Scithers

We think the way to become rich, famous, and successful in the writing trade (in addition to such obvious things as writing well, finishing what you write, and so on) is to aim at the best-paying market that might reasonably buy your material, and work on down from there. Obvious? All too many writers aim at the market that is most likely to buy their material — this cuts down on rejections, but it also cuts down income; the proper object of one's marketing strategy is to maximize *income*, not simply to minimize rejections.

Attempting to minimize rejections can cost more than just income too. Some writers try to be editors: they read what some market has already published, and then they try to write something that is as close to that as they can manage. But — what they're reading is material that an editor first read some six to twenty months ago; and in a field as fast-moving as ours, that's too much in the past. Also — what they're reading is what's already been done, and ours is a literature of *new* ideas. Worst, though, is that modeling one's writing on what's been bought and published can — consciously or unconsciously — limit one to doing no better than one's chosen model.

But yes — do read what your intended market is now publishing. As the travelling salesman puts it, "Ya gotta know the territory." But read to see what's *been* done, so you won't simply do it again; instead, do it *better*, or do it *differently*, or do *both*. While the sudden feeling, "Why, I can do better than *that*!" has produced some awful failures, it has also produced some stunning successes. And even if you do fail — you'll learn something from that maybe enough to *do* better next time; but at least you'll have learned what didn't work — and you'll have learned something about yourself in the process.

Again: a frightening amount of effort has been spent by writers trying to outguess editors; John W. Campbell once chided a writer who told Campbell that he'd decided that something he'd written wasn't suitable for *Astounding Science Fiction*; Campbell asked why the writer was trying to edit Campbell's magazine. When we edited *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, there seemed to be more of that than we see now at *Amazing®*, but we'd be happier to see even less. We've written innumerable rejection slips, a small booklet, and a 234-page book on what we think works and what we think doesn't in writing science fiction and fantasy. But we can be wrong — and frequently are; don't take what we say — or have bought in the past — all that seriously.

Just try to write a better story than you've seen us buy, and then let us see it.

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CLEAVING

by Jim Aikin

art: Jack Gaughan

The author is a musician by training, who played Top 40 in bars until he got thoroughly sick of it. He is currently assistant editor of Keyboard Magazine, *where he writes about music for an audience of musicians.*

Jim tells us he got into SF writing, because he was looking for an outlet for his feverish imagination. Of the 30-odd SF stories Jim has written, the fifth was published in F&SF, and the eighth appears here.

Having concluded that he has enough unsold stories on hand to meet the current demand, he is now working on a novel.

They put his wife on the table and strapped her down and slipped the gleaming machine over the very naked surface of her skull. A sourceless hum blossomed, and the thing on the other table, the thing that was not his wife, began to jerk and twitch. Inside him a spring coiling tighter and tighter snapped, and he was dashing across the room screaming, and they clawed at him but they were moving slow motion underwater and it was too late. . . .

It began, as so many things in the world begin (and end), with numbers. Somebody in an office someplace scanned a psychomath abstract and spotted the stirrings of a trend towards public resentment of Forever Incorporated. Little things — increased drug consumption in key sectors, shifting traffic patterns in selected metropolitan areas, the intensity of gutback on certain tridee shows — but psychomath correlated them. Nothing so crude as knocking on doors to ask people how they felt.

Equations showing preferred methods of trend reversal danced across a console, and were sifted for applicability. Budget analysis showed that Forever Incorporated's fabulously successful but high-overhead operation would comfortably accommodate a campaign of thus and such size. An n-dimensional matrix was plotted showing the points at which a change of psychovector would introduce the desired opinion shift. Citizen ident profiles were combed to find individuals who matched the matrix points. Other numbers — the phone and bank account numbers of certain influential hype flacks — served to generate the necessary hoopla. That's right, guys and gals, ain't it great, ain't it grand? They're *givin'* it away! You could be a winner the very next time the phone rings. What do you

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have to do? Nothin'! And what do you get out of it? (Solemnly:) You get to live forever. . . .

Howard Kusco shifted the grocery basket to his other hand and pressed his thumb to the doorpad. The door slid aside, and ten quiet steps took him across the threadbare rug to the kitchenette. The apartment was dim; the air stale with dinners past, human odors, and the faint, off-sweet tang of medicine. Heavy curtains soaked up the encroaching hiss of passing trains and the whine of hovercycles, and the walls gave back stillness.

When he had put tomorrow night's Quik N Reddy Kelpburgers in the stasis and dropped a Keesh-4-2 in the oven slot, Howard tiptoed to the bedroom door. By the cool cream glow of the phone cube, he saw Helen was sleeping. Her head sagged sideways propped on the pillow, and her labored breath rattled in the slack throat. The upper bedclothes were tangled from tossing, while those below her waist lay unnaturally smooth. Howard lowered himself gently to sit on the other bed and kicked off his shoes, his eyes never leaving the woman's face. It was drawn in lines of pain and blotched from old fevers. A thin strand of hair, blond going gray, straggled across the forehead. By her features she might once have been pretty. She was not pretty now.

She stirred, though her eyes didn't open. "Howard?" she called weakly. "Howard, are you home?"

"Yes, dearest. I'm right here."

"Oh. Goodness, you startled me. Come over here so I can touch you." He sank onto the edge of her bed, and her hands, as nervous as small birds, came plucking at him, then gripped with surprising strength. "I missed you," she said.

"I missed you, too." He leaned over and brushed his lips across the dry forehead.

"How was your day at work?"

"As usual," he said, as usual.

"What did you buy for dinner?"

"A quiche."

They sat silently, fingers intertwined, for several minutes. Then the oven chimed, and Howard padded out to the kitchen in his stocking feet to spoon the steaming quiche into two bowls. He poured Helen a glass of white wine, which the doctor said was all right for her, and himself a root beer. He brought her quiche on a bed tray. She had sat up straighter and was attempting, without much success, to make herself and the sheets more presentable. She had also pipped on the light, so that Howard could see better. He always left it for her to pip on; she needed to feel she was doing something for him, too.

He set the tray over her lap. "Mmm, that smells good." She fumbled for the fork.

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"Do you want the tridee on?" he asked.

"No, not yet."

When they had eaten he took the dishes out and ran them through the vibrasonic, then came back and very carefully lifted Helen up and carried her into the bathroom. He was always amazed at how light she seemed. While she was in the bathroom, he went around the apartment picking up odds and ends (there weren't many) so as not to confuse their persnickety, old robo-sweeper. Carrying her back to bed, he was struck forcefully with how much he loved this woman, so that his eyes filled with tears and he nearly stumbled.

"Are you all right, Howard?"

"Yes, dear. I'm all right." Kneeling, he lowered her slight body into the bed.

He pipped on the tridee and they watched "Exoticon" and part of the new de Gracchi hypnoswirl, which Howard liked but which Helen couldn't enjoy because it was mostly visual. Then Howard put on his pajamas and they went to bed.

The smooth, green sides of the tube slid downward as Howard rose toward Level 17. A force field held him in air, his feet dangling above the chasm. As he drew into the Level 5 port a familiar figure, broad of shoulder with a big square face and thinning mat of brown-red hair, stepped into space beside him. "Morning, Clay."

"Morning, Howard. Hey, you comin' to the game Saturday?" This was a standing joke. Clayton knew Howard always stayed home on weekends. He had even come to dinner a couple of times and regaled Helen Kusco with stories (probably mendacious) about his exploits in the Andes; this had cheered her for days afterward.

"Maybe," Howard responded.

"Listen, I got a couple of tickets. Change of scenery'd do you good." The jungle profusion of the Level 8 lobby sank past them.

"Thanks, Clay, but Helen needs me."

"She gets along all day. C'mon, I'm not taking no for an answer."

"You know why I don't come?" They glided up through the hub of the radiating corridors of Level 10. "Sure, she could get along for a Saturday. And I'd have a great time. And then there'd be another Saturday, and then a Tuesday night card game. Pretty soon she'd be nothing but a burden I was stuck with, and when I was there at all I'd just be dutiful and resentful. She'd sense that, and sooner or later it'd kill her."

"Yeah, I guess so. You got guts, Howard."

"Does it take guts to love your wife? Maybe it does."

When they got to their cubicle, the phone was chiming, so Howard pipped it. Helen's face formed in the air above the cube.

"Howard, is that you?"

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"Yes, dear. Is everything all right?"

"I don't know. I think everything's better than all right. I just got a phone call, Howard."

"From Mary Beth?"

"No, no, it was from — oh, what did he say his name was? Gron, that was it, Amberton Gron. Anyway, he was calling to let me know I'd been selected as a recipient — that was how he put it, *selected as a recipient* — in a new program they have. It's — oh, Howard, you won't believe it. I didn't believe it, I made him repeat it twice. It's a program they have where they *give* people new bodies. They *give* them to you, Howard. Can you believe that? Can you?"

"Oh, darling, that's — that's wonderful; amazing!" But foreboding mingled with his elation. "There's not some kind of catch? It's not for experiments or something?"

"Howard, you're such a pessimist. It's Forever Incorporated, just like the astronauts and the big tycoons, and they want to give *me* a body! I'll be able to see, Howard, I'll be able to walk. We'll be able to take that vacation after all." She choked with happy tears. They had been planning the vacation eleven years before, but cancelled it when she was taken ill.

Howard found himself crying, too, and Clayton was pounding him on the back and whooping, and Ms. Bunshah and Mr. Nakamura heard the commotion and came running, so Helen had to explain it all over again for them.

Howard made it through the day in a daze. He slipped out twelve minutes early (with Mr. Nakamura's okay) to catch the early train. "I'm home, Darling," he called as the door slid open.

"Come sit with me." She held her arms out to him and they embraced. "Isn't it wonderful?" she exclaimed.

"I hardly know what to think," Howard said. "It doesn't seem real somehow. It's like a dream."

"A dream come true! Oh, Howard, I'm so happy! They want us to come down on Saturday and make the arrangements. They have to take tests to make sure I'm compatible, and you'll have to pick out a new body for me. It's all so exciting!"

"Have you thought what you want to look like? You could be a long-legged brunette, or a flaming redhead with a face full of freckles."

"No, I think I want to look mostly like I did before, only maybe with a turned-up nose and dimples."

"One set of dimples comin' up, ma'am."

The phone chimed. He pipped it. A face he'd never seen before floated up from the cube. "Mr. Kusco?"

"That's right."

"Brenner, from Channel Twelve. How does it feel that your wife is going to turn into a beautiful young woman?"

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"Well — great, just great."

"Mrs. Kusco, they tell me Forever Incorporated is doing you a little favor."

"A big favor!"

"What's the first thing you're gonna do when you can see and walk again?"

"Ohhh, maybe Howard and I will rent a cottage by the beach for a few days. If he can get time off from work, that is."

"Sounds like a wrinkle. Pip the fax at nineteen and glom yourself." He winked out.

Helen made Howard get out the red kimono, which she wore for company. After he helped her on with it, he went and dropped the kelpburgers in the oven slot. There were three more brash and breezy calls from reporters before they finished eating.

That evening, he pipped up a Forever Incorporated briefing on the tridee and they listened to it together, holding hands. It explained how the Forever machine read the complete electrochemical pattern of the brain, including all subconscious memories and latent potentials, and impressed the pattern onto another brain.

The new bodies were grown in tanks, with enzymes to speed up their growth and exercise machines to keep them healthy. Doctors monitored the bodies. Growing them was *very* expensive.

Forever Incorporated had two types of customers: multiple transfers and individuals. The multiples, better known as dupes, were people whose special talents made them worth duping as many as a thousand times. The government had strict controls on who could become a dupe and who couldn't. The individuals ("That's me," said Helen) were mainly rich people who were getting old, but there were also accident and disease victims who took advantage of the process. The original person the dupes were copied from was often left to continue his or her life, in case more dupes were needed. The individuals had their old body put painlessly to sleep after the machine verified that transfer was complete.

The briefing ended with a sampling of the new body styles, a blur of faces and torsoes in dozens of shapes and shades with fanciful names like "The Samurai" and "The Milk Maid." Helen asked him to describe them to her, but they went by too fast, so he did a replay. There was one, "The Aphrodite," that was blond with a turned-up nose and dimples. She was so beautiful she brought a lump to Howard's throat. It was Helen Kusco — Helen not as she had been, but as, in a brighter world, she might have been.

After they had pipped out the light, Howard lay for a long time in the dark, staring at the ceiling, thinking.

"I can't do it, Clay," Howard Kusco said, shaking his head. "I can't let

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them do that to her."

"You *what?*"

They were sitting in the Tonk, a booze and smoke pit halfway between work and the commuter train station. Howard was having a scotch on the rocks, Clayton something tall and blue called a Phobos Phizz.

"You know what they do to them? They kill them. They put a needle in them and their hearts stop. I can't let them do that to her."

"Howard, jeez, it's not killing her. How can it be, if she's still there afterwards talking to you?"

Howard had asked Clayton to join him for a drink after work. Clay had suggested the Tonk, where green and violet mermaids swam through the room, eerily silent, translucent, undulating in the air. They were projections. It was a typical neighborhood bar.

"It wouldn't be her. She'd be in the ground, and something else — something they grew in a tank — would be thinking it was her."

"Crelt and crelt flakes. Howard, I'm gonna talk straight with you, 'cuz I don't want to see you throw away the only chance you and Helen got for happiness. You'd do it, too, so listen. I saw a science show one time. They said every atom in your body changes every seven years. Who you were seven years ago, that's all mud someplace. Maybe you keep your same teeth, I don't know.

"But you're still the same person you were before, see? So what's the same? Not the atoms. And sure not the teeth. You can lose all your teeth and still be you. What's the same is the pattern, see? It's the pattern of the way you think and who you think you are. That's all you are. And that's all Helen is. That's all she is now, that's all she will be after the transfer, is that pattern. It's the pattern you love, too. You'll forgive me speaking frankly, but it's not that shrivelled-up shell you love. That ain't Helen anyway, and you'd both be better rid of it, and have some fun outta life while you're still young enough. You asked me, that's what I think. You go ahead and ask her, she'll tell you the same."

"I can't ask her."

"Crelting why not? It's her they're giving the body to. If it ain't her business, I don't know."

"If I asked her, she'd agree with you. She's so *happy*. She's been cooped up all these years. . . ."

"Know what I think, Howard? I think you got cold feet. How many years it been since you been with a woman?"

"Damn it, that's not it, Clay."

"And now somebody wants to put you in the sack with some eighteen-year-old hot pot, even if she is your wife, and you figure you ain't gonna be man enough for her. Yeah, you better hang onto that old cripple woman. She ain't goin' nowhere."

Howard's hands were shaking. "You take that back."

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"Aw, siddown, Howard, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it, honest. But you gotta think about these things. Lotta times people do damnfool things for what sounds to them like the best reasons going. Then they put 'em under the psych scanner and the holo says, 'I wanna kill Daddy and marry Mummy.' Know what I mean?"

"Yeah, you're right. I shouldn't have gotten steamed. It's only — I don't know what to do. I love her, and I want her to be happy more than anything. But how can you be happy when you're dead?"

A green and violet mermaid undulated by, her sightless eyes fixed intently just to the right of Howard's head.

"I don't know, Howard," Clayton concluded. "I still think you're talking yourself out of an awfully sweet deal."

Howard Kusco shook his head sadly. "Thanks for the drink, Clay. I got a train to catch."

"Any time, Howard. Sorry I couldn't be more help."

"What's eatin' him?" the bartender asked, gazing after Howard's retreating back. The bartender was wearing a skindiving suit covered with iridescent green and violet scales. His gloved fingers sported green and violet webbing.

"He just won the sweepstakes," Clayton answered.

"Oh. Yeah, right. I shoulda known."

The salesman was a dapper, round-faced man with a small, bland, personable, meaningless smile permanently affixed between his nose and his chin. He had received instructions from Very High Up that Mr. and Mrs. Kusco were to receive every courtesy. In their drab, worn clothes they looked alien among the gleaming cases. The ceiling was very high, and receded into dimness. The cases, on pedestals, were glass all around and cunningly lighted. Each case held a single nude human form, perfect, inanimate. The little party strolled slowly, Howard pushing Helen's chair. Murmurs of other voices came to them, echoing, drained of meaning, but they saw nobody alive. They were alone in a glass forest of exquisite naked people, a timeless funhouse of the ideal.

"The Aphrodite is right over this way," the salesman murmured. "She's not so popular as some of our other models." In fact, the Aphrodite was very popular indeed; but the sales manual wisely pointed out that the individual transfer clients didn't like feeling that they were going to look like dupes. "But the more I look at you the more I'm convinced she's perfect. The similarity is quite striking. I'm sure you'll feel very natural in her. Ah, here we are."

The blond goddess in the case was standing with one leg slightly raised, as though caught taking a step. Her eyes were closed, her coral lips slightly parted. Her hands were poised palms forward just out from her thighs, as though in invitation. Her pubic hair was a curling cloud of

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ringlets, a tawny nest that diffused outward so subtly its tendrils seemed to dissolve into smoke, so that you half expected to feel one coiled around your finger as you stood looking. Howard looked. He paced slowly around the case, examining the dimpled back, the up-tilted nipples, the graceful neck.

"Well?" Helen demanded. "Well?"

"She's — she's very lovely." Howard felt a sigh rising in him, and caught it before it surfaced.

"Tell me about her."

"She's blond. . . . I don't know how." Howard appealed silently to the salesman.

"The Aphrodite was crafted by one of our most gifted young genetic engineers, and I have to say that in my personal opinion, he outdid himself. She stands 168 centimeters tall and weighs 48 kilograms. She has perfectly formed features, small dimples in her cheeks and chin, blue eyes flecked with lavender. She has blond hair and a fair complexion, and like all of our models she is certified completely free of genetic and structural defects of any kind, however slight." The salesman smiled blandly.

"She sounds just right. What do you think of her, Howard? I'll trust you to decide."

"I think you'd like her. I'm sure you'd like her."

They went back to the salesman's office, which was panelled in warm wood and had a wide balcony overlooking the glass forest. When they had gotten Helen comfortable, Howard drew the salesman out onto the balcony. "I gotta ask you," he whispered. "After they do the transfer, is it her, or is it just a copy? I gotta know."

The salesman smiled personably. "That's a very good question, Mr. Kusco, one that the greatest religionists of the age have pondered over. Is there a soul? And does the soul leap the gap like a spark to dwell in the new body? Many of them feel sure it does.

"Believe me, Mr. Kusco, you're not the first person who has worried about this. Of course, it's usually the client himself or herself who is worried rather than a spouse. Quite frankly, Mr. Kusco, we at Forever Incorporated are not equipped to answer religious questions. What we offer is not a religious service but a scientific service.

"Rather than talking about the soul, we prefer to talk about the personality essence. The soul may or may not exist — nobody is even sure what it is, or how to define it. But the personality essence is an electrochemical reality we can measure. And I can assure you, Mr. Kusco, that to the limits of our most advanced testing equipment, the personality essence in the new body after transfer is five-nines identical to the personality essence that existed prior to transfer. Five-nines identical, Mr. Kusco. Need I say more?" The salesman smiled meaninglessly.

"No, I guess not."

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The salesman provided them a stack of forms to fill out, including three to take to Helen's doctor. Some of the usual forms were waived because the Kuscos weren't paying for the transfer, but others were substituted whereby Forever Incorporated was authorized to use and/or dramatize Helen Kusco's story in their public education programs. Howard wanted to take the forms home and read them, but the salesman hinted politely that Howard should be a little more charitable toward a company that was being so charitable toward them, so in the end they signed them.

"I did have a couple more questions," Howard said.

"Yes, Mr. Kusco."

"I want to know if it's all right for me to come watch the transfer. In the same room, I mean."

"Oh, Howard." Helen laid her hand on his arm.

The salesman remembered about extending every courtesy. "It isn't usual," he said, "but I'm sure we can arrange it. Was there something else?"

"The Aphrodite. Is she gonna get the one out there, the one we saw, or is it gonna be another one like it?"

"I don't —"

"'Cuz I don't think it'd be right to give her one everybody'd been starin' at."

"No, of course not. I understand perfectly. Mrs. Kusco's Aphrodite will be identical to the one you saw in every respect, but I'll personally phone and tell them that on no account is she to be given the floor model."

"I'm tired, Howard," Helen said petulantly. "Can we go home now?"

"Of course, dear." He took his place behind the chair. The salesman escorted them to the drop tube, smiling all the while.

Helen was tired from all the excitement and went to bed right after dinner. Howard pipped up the library index on the tridee, found what he wanted, and sat far into the night reading the flickering words it spilled at him across the air.

The morning of the transfer dawned in a steady drizzle. Howard watched the gray light creep up through a window. For two weeks he had not slept well. His fingers twisted and untwisted in the corner of the checkered tablecloth. "Can I do it?" he asked himself. "Can I stand there and just let them murder her?" There was no answer. The beckoning contours of the Aphrodite came to him. He wrenched his thoughts away, but the vision coiled into his mind like a thick perfume. It would be so easy to do nothing, let them take her and replace her with — what? Hikes on the beach, carefree laughter, other intimacies more intense. No.

But just as he couldn't let it happen, he couldn't allow himself to stop

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her. How could he deny her a chance at a new life after twelve years of blindness, pain, and hopeless frustration?

" 'Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.' " His fingers twisted and untwisted in the tablecloth.

He had ordered a surface taxi for 9:00. At 7:30 he waked her and carried her to the bathroom, and by 8:30 she was by the door in the chair, a long-unused handbag in her lap, humming a little tune and bobbing her head from side to side. Howard fought back tears. How could they do this to a woman?

During the taxi ride, Howard's ears were ringing and his hands were slick with sweat. Helen prattled gaily. It was all he could do not to scream at her, "For God's sake, woman, don't you know what they're planning to do to you?" He pressed his lips together and bit them till they bled, then dabbed the blood carefully with a handkerchief.

A distinguished but faintly perfunctory dignitary greeted them in the enormous opalescent lobby. "You can leave the chair here," he said. "We have a chair of our own waiting."

"That's all right," Howard said tightly. "I'll take her up myself."

"Stepping into a tube with a chair is tricky. The force fields can oscillate when they merge."

"I'll manage." They rose slowly past the green tube walls.

In the upper lobby, Howard kissed her tenderly as she was put on a gurney and whisked away. "See you in a little while," she called. He parked the chair carefully in an alcove just opposite the tubes.

"I'll show you to the lounge where you can wait," the dignitary said.

"They told me I could watch the transfer."

"Oh, but that's quite impossible. I'm sure you understand."

Howard's gut clenched into ice. "They promised me."

"There's really very little to see, and the technicians mustn't be disturbed. I'm sure you'd be more comfortable in the lounge."

Fighting to keep his voice calm, he said, "Well, maybe I could at least see the machine beforehand."

"Didn't you see it on the tridee briefing?" Tinged with annoyance.

"I'll only be here this once. I'd like to see it for real."

"Oh, all right. Only stand well back, and don't touch anything."

The transfer room was all cheerful yellows, with the complex triangular emblem of Forever Incorporated nearly filling one wall. Three technicians bustled around the misshapen bulk of the machine. Tiny lights winked and glittered. With a start, Howard saw that the Aphrodite was already in place, a close-fitting metal mesh covering her head.

"If you've seen all you care to see, I'll show you to the lounge."

Howard's shoulder muscles bunched with suppressed jitters. "How long till they do it?"

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"Ten minutes or so, I imagine. Right this way."

As they traversed the hall, Howard looked around in vain for something to hit the dignitary in the back of the head with. There were two other people in the lounge anyway; it was impossible. "Is there a washroom?" he said desperately.

"Just around the corner there."

Around the corner was also a door that led to a side hall that led back to the tubes. Nobody stopped him. Breathing fast and shallow, he opened the hooded robe he had stored under the chair and spread it on the seat. From its folds he removed the opticutter he had bought the day before. Still there was no challenge.

The door to the transfer room was locked! Fighting down panic he circled through unfamiliar halls, light on his feet, and found its other side. He slipped in the rear door unnoticed and stood back against the yellow wall making himself as still and small as he could. The room was cold, and full of small unfamiliar noises. Time dilated like a swelling yellow balloon. His feet were frozen in stone somewhere far away.

At his shoulder, the door slid back, and an orderly brought her past him on a gurney, unconscious, so close he could have touched the fresh nakedness of her scalp. He had never learned why they shaved the donor but not the recipient. Vanity, probably. And to dehumanize the donor. She was lifted onto the table and a broad strap pressed across her. His stomach was moving in a hot buzz now. He swallowed, swallowed again. The metal mesh cap was put in place.

Technicians called checks and cross-checks. At a word, at a click, a sourceless hum blossomed, and the thing on the other table, the thing that was not his wife, began to jerk and twitch under the inrushing of mind. Shrinking tighter against the wall, Howard counted. He had practiced the count a hundred times on the clock at home, but now nineteen seconds stretched out an endless vista before him. If the machine had been improved since the library materials were written, nineteen seconds was too long. If the machine ran into a hitch, nineteen seconds was too short. He could do nothing to affect, or even get any data on, these factors. He could only ignore them.

Eleven, Twelve, Thirteen.

Fourteen.

Fifteen.

Sixteen.

Seventeen. The other door opened and the dignitary pushed through, his eyes blazing and Howard was in motion screaming NO YOU CAN'T I WON'T LET YOU and startled faces turned toward him slowly underwater the eyes opening wider and he was past them, the opticutter slicing

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at the strap pulling it free one elbow going back connecting solidly with flesh and he scooped her up a little ragdoll woman and staggerdashing from the room and bolting down the hall to the tubes hearing shouts behind him setting her tenderly in the chair and pulling the robe shut the hood over her ugly scalp and sledding into the down tube and sinking slowly slowly feet dashing at his face sinking slowly and sledding out he dove across the lobby like a bongo racer and more shouting but the taxi was waiting and they got her in and left the chair and tore out of there in one damned big hurry.

She was stuffed with thick drug sleep. He called her regular doctor and then pipped the phone to 'refuse.' It was still drizzling. He thought about what he was going to tell her. He went and peeked in at her. The doctor came and looked at him with grave doubt, but pronounced her healthy and left. He nulled the door and thought some more about what he was going to tell her. After a while, he went and sat on the edge of the other bed so he'd be there when she woke.

She stirred.

"Helen?"

"Howard?"

"Just lie still and rest, darling."

"Howard, I can't — I can't — What's happened?"

"The transfer didn't work." He took a breath. "The doctors told me this happens once in a while. It just didn't take. There's nothing they can do. They asked me to bring you home."

"It didn't —" She sobbed. He went to her, and held her, and rocked her while she sobbed.

In a white room with blue curtains, a woman lay on a bed. She was blond, and she had dimples in her cheeks and chin. She stirred on the pillow. A man with a black beard leaned forward anxiously. The woman opened her eyes.

"Don't try to talk yet if you don't feel like it," the bearded man said, "I'm Dr. Barnacker. You're going to be just fine."

"Howard?" the woman said. "Where's Howard?"

"Howard will be here to see you soon. How do you feel?"

"I don't know. Oh. I can see. I'm seeing. Oh."

The man on the phone was thin-lipped, his voice brusque. "Our legal department has informed us, Mr. Kusco, that what you did, however shocking, was not illegal. However, you are definitely *persona non grata* on the premises of Forever Incorporated. As per our original agreement, we will take care of Mrs. Kusco — that is, the post-transfer Mrs. Kusco — for a week or so, until she achieves sufficient body adjustment to be

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released. If you attempt to see her or communicate with her in any way, you will be stopped. You have made your choice, Mr. Kusco, repellent as it may seem to outsiders, and under the circumstances we can hardly do otherwise than insist that you stick by it. I'm sure you understand."

"Yes," Howard said meekly. "I understand."

"You blew it, Howard," Clay said, shaking his head in disbelief, "you blew it. You lost your nerve."

"Yeah, I guess I blew it."

"You coulda had that hot little number, but you chickened out."

Howard didn't say anything. There was nothing to say.

"Howard, I had the strangest dream last night. I dreamed I was in a room with blue curtains, and a man with a black beard was telling me you couldn't come to see me." Her face, paler and more drawn than ever, turned fretfully on the pillow.

"Hush, darling. It was only a dream."

She came to see him when they let her out. He had hoped she wouldn't and known she would. The apartment was dim behind the heavy curtains, and smelled of cooking and medicine. Helen was asleep when the door chimed. He tiptoed across and closed the bedroom door before he answered it.

She was so beautiful she tore at his soul. Her eyes were uncertain. "Howard?"

He stepped back. She entered. "She's sleeping," he said. "You can't stay."

"I had to come. I had to know."

"I couldn't let them kill her, you see."

"But I'm not dead. It isn't death."

"Not for you, no. That was the other half. I had to give you a chance. You deserved a chance."

"Come with me. Howard. I need you." The blond aura radiated in the dim room.

"You don't need me. You can make your own way now. *She* needs me. Please don't ask. I don't want to be tempted."

"Then nothing's changed for you."

"No. Yes, something's changed. I don't know how to explain it. I had to do something hard, and I had to do it exactly right. I did it. So I have that. I'll always have that. And maybe what I'm doing now is even harder, but I'm doing it too, and I'm gonna keep on doing it. Please don't make it any harder. Please go away."

She paused in the doorway. "Howard — thanks. Thank you. Thank you." They were both crying, silently, their eyes locked together.

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He nodded. "Good luck," he said. She turned and was gone.

He stood in the dark, not moving. He heard Helen stirring in the other room. "Howard?"

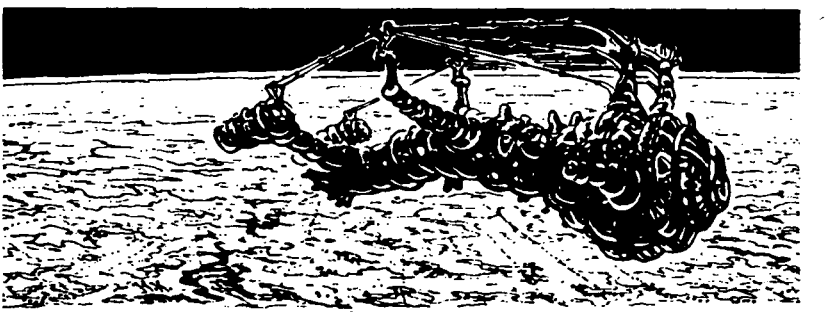
He went to her. "Yes, dear?"

"Who was that out there? I heard voices."

"It was nobody. A lady selling brushes, that's all." He sat on the edge of her bed and took her hand. "How are you feeling?"

"Oh, I'm all right."

They sat together in silence for a long time.



SF CLICHÉS II: PSIONICS

The psion bears the mark that is not seen
And has no sign of honor for his skill;
Not wealth nor rank creates him, nor machine,
But master-genes refined by force of will.
Yet those in power try to hunt him down,
Abetted by the stupid sons of earth,
For (known to but a few) a final crown
Belongs to him by right of noble birth.
The strongest hides his power among the least
And toils against the time his toil shall end,
And seeks the kindly wizard, clown, or beast
Who'll be his kingly counsel, and his friend.
Each night the psions rest their weary heads
And set their foes to burning in their beds.

— John M. Ford

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INTERVIEW

PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER: Riverworld, God, and Insect Lovers

by Darrell Schweitzer

Philip José Farmer's first science-fiction story appeared in the August 1952 issue of *Startling Stories*, and for once that venerable pulp magazine lived up to its title. The story was "The Lovers," a sensitive and moving novella (later expanded into a novel) which was the field's first serious exploration of a sexual theme. The response was sensational. Farmer won a Hugo Award the first year they were given, as Most Promising New Writer, on the basis of that one story. Since then he has been a genuinely *leading* figure in the field, frequently breaking new ground with substantial treatments of ideas which would seem too far-out even in a field which is supposed to be far-out. Who else would write a serious novel with a title like *Jesus On Mars*?

A major sequence of Farmer's work has to do with the Riverworld, a mysterious place in which every human being who ever lived is resurrected along the banks of a vast river — again and again. The first Riverworld novel, *To Your Scattered Bodies Go*, won a Hugo in 1972. The others in the sequence are *The Fabulous Riverboat, The Dark Design,* and *The Magic Labyrinth*. Some of his other books are *Flesh, Fire and the Night, Dare, Inside Outside, The Day of the Time-stop, The Gates of Creation, A Private Cosmos, The Maker of Universes, Two Hawks from Earth, Image of the Beast,* and *A Feast Unknown*.

Q: You've written many stories, such as, most recently, *A Barnstormer in Oz*, which revisit favorite fictional worlds. What is the appeal for you in this sort of thing?

Farmer: I think that basically what I'm doing is fulfilling childhood fantasies. I had always wanted to be a writer, and when I read the Tarzan books, the Oz books, the Sherlock Holmes books, and so on, I had the desire to continue the books beyond their range. I never got around to it when I was younger. In the past few years I finally fulfilled my childhood ambitions, but by that time I'd lived so long and read so much that they weren't really sequels. The books were expressions of my attitudes towards these series now, my desire, you might say, to make them even better but more realistic. I started with the Opar series, which I'm supposed to finish — it was originally going to be twelve books; then I cut it down to nine, then seven; now it's going to be five. And I might write one more Oz book. And of course, as you know, I've written about Tarzan and Doc Savage and Sherlock Holmes and a host of other people. I wouldn't call it therapy. It's just my childhood fantasies, and the desire to write something like an Oz book — which is quite different from anything Baum would have done, for instance. *A Barnstormer in Oz* is science fiction. I tried to explain a lot of the discrepancies in the Oz books, and, let's say, rationalize certain things that Baum didn't. He was writing fantasy and took it for granted. If you take the premise that the first Baum Oz book is true, then you have to explain why these things are true, like the Tin Woodman, and the Scarecrow, and so forth, and how magic could work, etc. But then I also managed to combine another of my loves in this story, and that's early aviation. The hero comes through the green gate

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into Oz in a Jenny. Well, there's a lot of other combinations of things too. But I only go into the worlds of other people when I love their worlds, and I'm not doing any harm, and a lot of people are enjoying it.

Q: Don't you also consider yourself very lucky that you were born with enough writing ability that you can sell your childhood fantasies?

Farmer: Oh, yeah. That's a matter of course. It's something I never thought of. If I hadn't been a writer already, and had written those things to start off with, I never would have done it.

Q: What were the books that you remember reading that made an impression on you?

Farmer: *Treasure Island.* My parents gave me a copy of that when I was very young, and I read it several times. I think it had illustrations by N. C. Wyeth, if I remember correctly. Or Louis Reed. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* made a terrific impression on me, and the works of Mark Twain. Jack London. The Oz books. Edgar Rice Burroughs. A. Conan Doyle. Jules Verne. And one book that made a terrific impression was John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.* When I was a child I had a huge, illustrated volume of that. The illustrations were by Doré. I've been influenced by many branches of literature. Of course, what I loved most then was fantasy and science fiction. Most children when they read *Gulliver's Travels* see only the wonders in there, but Jonathan Swift's view of humanity also made a tremendous impression on me. That may be partially responsible for my semi-cynical viewpoint right now. On the other hand, *Pilgrim's Progress* made for an optimistic viewpoint, and of course that was a religious book, and that enormously impressed me. Then, I also read the various parts of the Bible that I could understand when I was very little.

Q: When did you discover science fiction as a recognizable field, as opposed to some books you liked which, in retrospect, were science fiction?

Farmer: That's easy. That was 1929, when the first issues of Hugo Gernsback's *Air Wonder* and *Science Wonder* came out. I saw these books at the local drugstore, and Frank Paul's covers really grabbed me. Even though we didn't have much money then, I managed to get some money out of my father to buy those as they came out. That was my first contact with magazine science fiction. It was a golden day when I first saw those magazines.

Q: Did you get a sense of technological optimism from those magazines, at least for a time? That's what they radiated.

Farmer: Yes. Gernsback and a lot of his readers and writers thought that we could correct all our social and economic ills through technology. We could, too, if human beings were rational.

Q: Did you become disillusioned at some point?

Farmer: I was pretty much of an optimist regarding science and technology solving man's ills up until the time I wrote "The Lovers" in 1952. About that time I was having intimations that things were not going to go the way the Technocrats and Hugo Gernsback wanted them to go. Now, of course, I can see that whereas we have the *means* to solve our problems, due to economic and political and religious and nationalistic and individual human factors, we're just not going to do it. We're muddling along and we'll continue to muddle until something big happens. A lot of peo-

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ple are worried about nuclear war, and this is a justifiable worry, but I don't worry about that. It's either going to happen or it's not going to happen. What I do worry about, among other things, is our increasing loss of farmland, as against the ever-increasing population. The growth has slowed down, but the population is still increasing. You can draw two curves, which will meet twenty, perhaps thirty years in the future, when suddenly we're not gong to have enough farmland. I'm not talking just about the U.S., but the whole world. You can base a pretty grim prediction on that. It seems kind of ridiculous right now because of our present crop surpluses, but all you have to do is arithmetically base a projection, and unless something unforeseen happens, within the next thirty years there is going to be a general world-wide starvation.

Q: Gernsback definitely thought that science fiction had propaganda value and could influence the way the future turned out. Do you think science fiction has this ability?

Farmer: I think about the only influence that science fiction really had was in predicting space travel. It's possible that the German scientists may have been influenced by science fiction. I do think it gave the general population a sense of anticipation. I mean, if space travel had come upon us suddenly, without any preparation, it would have been greeted as a great, wonderful thing, but actually, with the science-fiction books and the so-called science-fiction movies, the public was ready for it. Now we do know that a number of people in the U.S. military fought against the idea of rockets, even when the Germans had demonstrated some of their potentialities with the V-2. It was only when the Russians put Sputnik up that the military had to break through their conservative shell and get going on that. But I do think that science fiction prepared the U.S. population for these space wonders. Actually, although there is a certain air of excitement about the whole thing, I think the general population is rather apathetic. The first man on the Moon was a big event, but people thought, "Yeah. They're going to the Moon. Sure. We've seen that in the movies." Actually some of the movies look more realistic than what you saw on TV.

Q: Allegedly a survey has been taken which shows that a large portion of the American populace doesn't believe the Moon landing actually happened. They think it was faked, because it was on TV and the effects weren't very good. But, aside from that, it seems we're living in the future depicted in 1930s science fiction, with Moon landings, atomic power, transatlantic flight, television, and the like . . . only Frank R. Paul left some of the details out. Do you think science fiction can continue to be like this? Without the stories being overtly preachy "warnings," would it be possible to make the public aware of the diminishing food supply by simply writing enough stories about it until the concept becomes universally familiar?

Farmer: The trouble with writing so many stories about it is that readers become wary of such stories. They don't want to think of such things. I don't think that science-fiction stories about overpopulation have done anything to persuade the world to take birth control measures. What control measures have been taken have just come about naturally, mostly pioneered by people who were aware of what overpopulation can do. They weren't warned by science-fiction stories. It was their own thinking that

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did it. I really don't think that future science-fiction stories will have much effect on the general population, for the simple reason that they don't read science fiction. What they see in the movies, with a few exceptions, is not real science fiction. They're stories, adventures, and have no effect whatsoever.

Q: At what time did you know that you wanted to be a science-fiction writer?

Farmer: When I was anywhere from around twelve to thirteen, I knew I wanted to be a writer. I wasn't planning on being a science-fiction writer. I was really interested in doing mainstream. I just wandered into the field, even though I'd been an avid reader of science fiction in books and magazines since 1926. I still haven't given up on being a mainstream writer.

Q: Do you find it easier to sell science fiction and keep it in print? I notice that your mainstream novel, *Fire and the Night*, is not around anymore, while the novel version of *The Lovers* is. Is this a coincidence, or is it something about the field itself?

Farmer: I think if I'd had a very good agent when I wrote *Fire and the Night*, it would have come out in hardcover; and if properly pushed, it could have become a best seller. As it was, it just fell by the wayside. However, I don't know that if it had been a best seller, it would have been reprinted. One of the beautiful things about being a science-fiction writer is that, although you may not make as much money as a mainstream writer or hit it big — that was up until a few years ago, of course — science fiction is peculiar in that it reprints a lot of your stuff, and keeps reprinting it. I don't find that in any other field. Over the long haul you can make pretty good money on it, and your stories are kept in print. That was one benefit of science fiction I didn't think about. Actually, I had always loved science fiction, and I had some ideas, and I wrote "The Lovers" in 1952 and it created a lot of controversy and got me started. It may be that my unconscious was telling me that I should wait until I'd lived long enough and seen enough that I could really write mainstream. Now when I'm talking about mainstream, I'm talking about novels that have to do with today, with human characters. I don't know when I write this mainstream novel if I'll be using science-fiction techniques. Some of the people who have written science-fiction novels, like Kurt Vonnegut, but who deny it, are characterized by various academics as authors who write mainstream but use science-fiction techniques. It's all a lot of nonsense. Then others are characterized as people who write science fiction but use mainstream techniques. I've been working on this one mainstream novel off and on. I haven't written any text, but a lot of notes and so forth. Now Tom Robbins and Thomas Pynchon use what I would call science-fiction techniques in their mainstream literature. Perhaps it might be a fusion of the two. I don't know. What was the original question? [Laughs.]

Q: Whether it is inherent in the nature of science fiction that it stays in print longer than mainstream.

Farmer: It's a funny thing. H.G. Wells of course wrote his science romances, but he was very serious about writing propaganda novels, sociological mainly. Curiously, the stuff that the critics admired in his day, the non-science fiction, has not survived. Very few people read his other books. But the science fiction has survived. I'm trying to think of

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some other authors who perhaps wrote science fiction on the side, but only the science fiction has survived.

Q: Robert W. Chambers is a good example.

Farmer: Yeah, Chambers. The other day I was thinking about it, and I can't think of their names right now. But sometimes what the critics praise doesn't survive and what they deride does survive. The best stuff that H.G. Wells wrote was his science romances. And I've noticed that Edgar Rice Burroughs, for instance, who was not the world's greatest writer, although he did originate one of the world's great characters, Tarzan — his books are still being reprinted, while a lot of the books by others that were praised and were bestsellers in his time have dropped completely into oblivion. He's still here. There's something to be said for science fiction and fantasy having a staying power.

Q: In addition to it being a matter of no one reading the critics a hundred years later, it seems to me to be just one of the books that people want to read. The critics didn't like Sherlock Holmes, but he's still with us.

Farmer: That's it. It's what people want to read, not what the critics say they should read. Those are the books that survive.

Q: When you were writing "The Lovers" and other stories in the 1950s, this shook a lot of people up. Did you do this deliberately, from a feeling that the field was moribund and needed to expand its horizons, or were you surprised at the controversy?

Farmer: I had the feeling certainly that science fiction was a field that should treat all aspects of human life. A mature treatment of sex was certainly lacking in science fiction, and even immature treatments were rare. I felt that science fiction should be able to handle everything, like religion, politics, everything. I knew when I wrote it that I might have some trouble getting "The Lovers" published. In fact, as I have said numerous times before, Campbell and Gold turned it down with comments that the story nauseated them. I was very fortunate that Sam Mines and Jerry Bixby were editor and assistant editor respectively of *Startling*, and they were receptive. I think they saw the potentiality of it. They were ready to risk it, and it turned out not to be a risk. I think that most of the readers were ready for it. It was the *zeitgeist* that enabled them to accept it. If I'd sent it out in 1942, I don't think there would have been a magazine in the field that would have taken it.

Q: Were you left with the feeling that Mines was a better editor? I get the impression that in a lot of subtle ways, *Startling* was a better magazine than *Galaxy* or *Astounding* in that period. It *was* more innovative, and it also published the story that was too realistic for Edmond Hamilton to sell earlier, "What's It Like Out There?" He wrote it in the 1930s and couldn't sell it because it was, basically, too realistic.

Farmer: Sam Mines was not one for whom science fiction was his big, single passion, as with Campbell and Gold. He was interested in all types of literature. He'd written a couple of science-fiction stories, but had written many westerns. He wasn't worried as much about the reaction of his readers as Campbell and Gold were. So he thought, "Well, here's something that's really going to cause a sensation. We'll publish it and see what happens." It turned out all right. I think he was willing to take more chances than the other two were. Of course Campbell was willing to take a lot of

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chances on other things, but not in the realm of sex.

Q: Did you have any problems with the then-equivalent of the Moral Majority? Or was there no such element then?

Farmer: They were around, very strongly, but they didn't read science fiction then. There were some people who you might say really belonged to the Moral Majority, and I got a few letters from them. So did Sam. But there weren't too many in the field, actually. If it had been in a major national magazine — of course this would have never happened — like the *Post* or something like that, the uproar would have been terrific. But who cared what went on in science fiction then?

Q: You're commonly credited with opening this area up to a lot of others. Do you think you were the groundbreaker?

Farmer: I was a ground-breaker in that I did it. Ted Sturgeon of course had a lot of ideas too, some of which were turned down. When "The Lovers" was accepted, that did open the wedge for Ted to come in not only with new stories, but stories he'd written earlier. Still, there was a lot of resistance when I wrote "Mother" shortly after "The Lovers." Campbell and Gold didn't want it. By the time I wrote "Open To Me, My Sister," which later came out as "My Sister's Brother," Sam Mines had left, Popular Publications [The publishers of *Startling*] had folded, so I eventually sent the story to Bob Mills, who was editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. He didn't want to take a chance on it. He rejected it. Then Leo Margulies bought it. He was going to publish it as the lead story in a magazine called *Satellite*. He had set it up in galleys, and in the meantime Bob Mills had been thinking about the story. He couldn't get it out of his mind. So when *Satellite* folded, he bought the story back from Margulies, and decided to publish it. I've got a number of stories that were bounced by editors, and they couldn't get them out of their minds, and decided to buy them later on. It's a phenomenon that doesn't happen too often.

Q: What was the result when the story appeared in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*?

Farmer: I really don't know, because the magazine didn't have a letter column. *Startling* and *Thrilling Wonder* had big letter columns, so you could get the reaction from the fans. This one? I don't know.

Q: Didn't the Riverworld series have its origins in this period?

Farmer: That's quite a story. I wrote the original Riverworld novel in 1952, for a contest. If I remember correctly, it was called the International Fantasy Award contest. This was a big deal in that a certain specialty press was going to produce the hardcover edition, and Pocket Books was going to produce the softcover edition. In those days there weren't too many science-fiction novels, especially in softcover. Pocket Books was putting up most of the money. I never got the $4000 check, which was a lot of money in those days. It turned out that the specialty hardcover publisher had diverted the money elsewhere, and Pocket Books was under the impression that the specialty publisher had the manuscript, and they couldn't understand why they couldn't get it out of him. Finally I got an agent and she found out what had happened. The hardcover publisher had me rewrite it once, telling me that Pocket Books wanted the rewrite, but they'd never actually seen the manuscript. So

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everything hit the fan and the specialty publisher went bankrupt, and I didn't get the money, and Pocket Books was so fed up with the whole deal that they didn't want to publish any science fiction for some time. Due to the fact that I had to rewrite the novel, or thought I had to, I wasn't able to write other stuff, and I'd gone into full-time writing as a result of my anticipation of getting money from the contest. It ruined my career for a number of years. I went back to work. Then a couple years later I started writing on the side again. But the novel sat around in manuscript form in the trunk for years, and finally I took it out and sent it to Ballantine. Betty Ballantine rejected it with the comment that it just seemed to be an adventure novel. I don't think she read it very closely. So I sent it to Fred Pohl who was editing *Galaxy* by then, and he returned it with the comment that the concept was too vast even for a 150,000-word book. It should be a series. I looked at it and I agreed with him. So I took the original manuscript and used a certain number of the characters in it, but very few of the episodes. I changed the plot a good deal, but I still used the basic concept, and I wrote some novelets for Fred Pohl's *Worlds of Tomorrow* and *If.* Then I took these and put them together and expanded them, and produced the first novel, *To Your Scattered Bodies Go*, and the second one, *The Fabulous Riverboat.* Then some years later I wrote *The Dark Design,* and I continued that in *The Magic Labyrinth.* Right now I'm working on the fifth Riverworld novel, which will really be the final one. The reason I continued is that when I finished *The Magic Labyrinth*, I left myself with a tiny loophole in the last paragraph. I didn't know if I was going to take advantage of that or not. And then I got to thinking: well, here are eight people in this tower in the polar sea, who have more power available than any human being on Earth has ever had before. Can they resist that temptation? Can they use it well, or will they be corrupted?

Q: Even after all that, doesn't the original manuscript amount to an unpublished Riverworld novel?

Farmer: Yeah, it does, but unfortunately I only have parts of it. What happened was this: I had a carbon copy of it, but I gave the original to a convention. I can't remember which one it was. It was on the West Coast. Somebody on the East Coast purchased it. Recently I've gotten feelers from various special-edition publishers, who would like to print it, as a curiosa. But I don't know who bought it. I do have a carbon of the second version, the rewrite, and possibly they might bring that out. It would be quite a lot different from what came out in later years. I only used a small part of it, and four or five of the characters. In the interim between the time when I first wrote it and the time I started writing these novelets which were part of the series, the ideas in it had grown, of course, in a somewhat different direction. But Fred Pohl was right. I didn't really do the concept justice in a 150,000-word novel. It needed something more like a million.

Q: Could you briefly describe the content of the missing novel?

Farmer: *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* starts on the day when apparently all of humanity is resurrected along the banks of the Riverworld. The original novel started twenty years afterwards. Burton was the main hero, and Mark Twain did show up later on in the novel, but if I remember correctly, people like Cyrano de Bergerac

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and Hermann Goering weren't in it. Joe Miller was, and Lothair von Richthofen, the Baron's brother, was in it, but that represents the list of people who were in the first novel who appeared later. I changed the heroine from somebody else to Alice Liddell Hargreaves. The mystery was there, but the trip up the river was much faster. I changed the ending too. The ending that you found in *The Magic Labyrinth* was not quite what you found in the original. I did use a few sections here and there, especially those relating to Joe Miller, but otherwise it was entirely different in writing and in the way the plot went. A number of ideas which are in *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* and the sequels were not in the original. If I remember correctly, the original title was *Owe for the Flesh*, and later I changed that title to *Owe for the River* for the second version. "I owe for the flesh" is a quote from *Moby Dick*, where Captain Ahab say that he is ". . . down in the whole world's books, I owe for the flesh."

Q: Was the first novel designed to have sequels, or did it wrap everything up at the end?

Farmer: I didn't think at all about a sequel. It seemed to wrap everything up. But you have to realize that when I decided to enter the contest, I had just a little over a month to get the manuscript in. So I wrote the whole novel in a month; and as fast as I wrote the rough draft and scribbled in rewrites, Betty, my wife, retyped parts and a fellow next door retyped and — was Randall Garrett there then? — and Randall retyped. Three or four different people typed the finished product as fast as I was turning it out. I was working all day long, into the evenings. 150,000 words is a lot to get done in a month. [Laughs.] It might not be for a old-time pulp writer, but that was the first novel I had done. I didn't have time to think about such things as sequels. I started from the beginning, which was twenty years after the first resurrection, and went right on through, and solved the mystery in the tower at the end. I didn't think about a sequel. But you've got to remember that the present Riverworld series is actually one long novel. What I've done is start from the beginning, at the first resurrection, and work my way through. There's been a lot of wordage, but it's been a long river.

Q: This inevitably leads to the question of what your writing methods are like. Do you still turn it out with just one draft and some rewrites, or do you outline?

Farmer: I outline everything now, including short stories. An outline for a novel sometimes becomes two or three. I'll write an outline, and then I'll write another outline filling that one out and correcting it, and then sometimes a third one. I spend considerably more time on revision than I used to. No way now could I sit down and write 150,000 words in a month. But then I was young then.

Q: Do you follow the outlines closely, or are they just touching points for something that becomes spontaneous?

Farmer: You have to fill in the outline. That's the big thing. Quite often when I'm partially through an outline I will get an idea, and it will veer away from what I had originally outlined. Then you're on your own. But if you get something that's really radical — let's say you're half-way through the outline — then you sit down and outline from there. Very possibly you'll have to go back and redo the first part of the outline too. I take a great deal of time in working

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out the outline. But once you've done that, it's just a schematic or guide sitting over there as sort of a reminder, because the actual writing of the novel involves so many details you don't even think about when you're doing the outline. It's not exactly like the framework you put up for a house, because once you put up the framework, you know exactly what you're going to do. You have very detailed schematics. With an outline for a novel you have a framework, but you don't know then what kind of house it's going to turn out to be: Georgian, Cape Cod, or a skyscraper maybe. You might originally plan on a one-story bungalow and end up with the Empire State Building.

Q: What are you working on now? What's coming out soon?

Farmer: As I said, I'm working on a sequel to *The Magic Labyrinth*. And I have one more contract with Putnam's for a novel called *Dayworld*, which is based on the same society that was represented in my short story, "The Sliced-Crosswise-Only-on-Tuesday World," where I had a unique idea for solving the overpopulation problem. I got to thinking about that. Of course the society is very sketchily done in the short story. The implications and the workings-out of that society were enormous, so I wrote two outlines for that. Once at a lecture at Illinois State University I even threw this idea out to the audience because I had certain problems. I told them and I said, "Now what do you think about this?" Some of them came up with answers and some of them came up with new problems that I had to consider. If my own perspective is too narrow, other people might see things that I didn't, which they did. This is the only case when I've ever asked other people to participate in the creation of a novel, but I thought they might be interested in the idea of solving the world's overpopulation. They were, and they were quite intrigued by it. So *Dayworld* is next, and then I want to write a mainstream novel called *Pearl-Diving in Old Peoria*, which takes place in the early 50s.

Q: Are there going to be sidestream Riverworld books, out of the main sequence?

Farmer: I had planned for two. I don't know whether it'll come out two or one. The reason I did that was because, due to the tempo of the novels, and also the wordage limits, I could not consider the many particular and minute details that would be involved in constructing vital societies, or into many, many problems that would arise. So I wanted to have a sidestream novel, in which I would not use any of the characters in the mainstream, but other people, and start right from the first day and show how this particular individual would be behaving and reacting in these societies which formed from chaos, and became in many ways completely different from anything that had ever been on Earth. There were a lot of other problems I wanted to tackle too. But the difficulty is that you can't write a sociological treatise. You have to have a certain amount of mystery and adventure in order to have a good storyline. You don't want to forget that.

Q: What do you anticipate doing after all these projects are completed?

Farmer: I have quite a few ideas for other novels, but at the same time I've started a number of series I should finish. I once sat down and figured out that I had fifteen series I'd started. Now a lot of people didn't know that some of these short stories are supposed to be the beginnings of series.

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I've got two more books in the World of Tiers series, and I hope to finish it up then. Three more in the Opar series. And once I wrote a novel called *The Stone God Awakens*, which was supposed to be a trilogy. I suppose I should finish that up. There are so many more it gets depressing thinking about it. I may not finish them all, but I would like to finish the ones that a lot of people have expressed interest in, like the World of Tiers. Many years ago I started a series about an interstellar Catholic priest, Father John Carmody. I left that poor guy hanging up in space with an egg growing on his chest for about twenty, twenty-five years. I'd like to finish that, because I've got about three more novelets in that series. I wrote a story about a super-intelligent German police dog, Ralph von Wau Wau. I'd like to finish those short stories. There's a lot of them. So much to do.



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THE SIX-LEGGED BEAR

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The authenticity of the setting of this story is unmistakable: indeed, the author has Been There — two half-year voyages aboard the cutter Northwind.

He lives in the Northwest, in a place with "Port" in its name. He likes building his own houses; he has not said he likes *writing, but confesses it's hard to stop. He weighs about twice as much as five years of unsold manuscripts. Technical illustration has helped bring home the bacon — but this story, his first fiction sale, will not be the last.*

At a range of a thousand yards the man on the ice appeared to be wearing a Soviet trooper's hat. At five hundred, the hat looked more like a deerstalker, though Captain Farrell couldn't be certain. The icebreaker lurched and heaved its way across the intervening pressure ridges, jogging his binoculars off target.

"For a guy who ought to be dead, he looks pretty damn chipper," growled the exec.

"I checked the tape, Captain: twice," said the chief radarman, his breath steaming. "Three hundred. He piled in at three hundred *minimum*. Straight down."

Captain Farrell lowered the binoculars. He kept his face carefully expressionless, for his thoughts rushed and tumbled like the blocks of ice under the bows.

It had taken four hours to reach the crash site. In that time the air temperature had risen from an early-morning low of minus one to its present level of eight above.

Eight degrees Fahrenheit. With a ten knot wind. A murderous combination for a man in street clothes.

Briefly, Farrell considered the possibility of a sub. But only briefly. Here, north of the Lena, the depth of water barely allowed the pack itself to float. A Russian submarine was an impossibility. So like it or not, this walking fashion plate of theirs had come by air. And the wreckage had gone to the bottom of the Laptev Sea.

Farrell turned to the officer of the deck. "That's far enough. We'll lie-to here."

The full-throated rumble of the diesels faded, and the deck became as solid as marble underfoot.

"I'll use Gowdy," said the executive officer.

Farrell nodded. Gowdy's Russian was said to be fluent.

Out on the ice, the man in the tweed suit lifted his walking stick and waved. As he advanced, his shoes kicked up a shower of glistening crystals. *"Hallo!"* he called. "I say! Could you chaps give a fellow a lift?"

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The morning sun invaded the cabin of the cutter *Boreas* like a searchlight beam, turning the jacket of the Filipino steward a blinding white. By comparison, the visitor, dressed in grayish wool, seemed almost wraithlike.

He was a small man, with dark hair, combed straight back from the forehead.

"Well, Mr. Smyth," said the captain, "you've survived the Arctic — do you think you might also survive a cup of Coast Guard coffee?"

"Thank you, no."

"Tea, then. Or something stronger? It may still be morning, but I think under the circumstances . . ."

"No. Thank you." Mr. Lawick-Smyth bent above the captain's desk to study a model ship inside a bottle. "Fascinating," he said in his light, condescending voice. "Utterly fascinating."

Frowning, the captain dismissed the steward. Lawick-Smyth had left the ship model and was studying a pair of mating bears, carved in walrus ivory.

"Eskimo," said Farrell. "Traditional design. Called a six-legged polar bear."

"Remarkable," said Lawick-Smyth in the same tone as before. "I particularly like the red paint on the protruding tongues."

Captain Farrell glared silently at his guest. "You were heading northward . . . out of Siberia," he said at last. "From inside the Soviet Union."

There was no response.

"Our friends to the south aren't in the habit of allowing medium-altitude use of their air space," the captain went on. "Except, of course, for *authorized* flights."

"Friends?" The man seemed genuinely puzzled. Then his face cleared. "Oh, you mean *Jerry!*"

"No, I *don't* mean Jerry," answered the captain.

He had to take a long, calming breath before trying again.

"What'll happen is this: sometime in the next hour I'll be sending a message. Encoded. That message, or a variant of it, will be going to the highest level of the U.S. government. Now, if there is *anything* that should be included . . ."

The visitor was stroking the wings of his neatly trimmed mustache and staring in a bemused fashion at the bulkhead. "In-clude-ed," he echoed, as if savoring the word.

Captain Farrell took off his parka, tossed it aside and sat behind his desk. "This ship . . . Mr. *Smyth* . . . won't be touching land for another seven weeks. Now, as I see it you have two options. First: should the people to the south be friends of yours, you *may* contact them. Courtesy of the U.S. Coast Guard. In which case, arrangements can be made — so that they may pick you up."

Lawick-Smyth listened politely, eyes blinking.

"*Second* option. You can do nothing. You can leave me wondering if

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there's going to be an air-borne assault to get you back. A 60-knot fish perhaps, when we get to deep water. You can do that. You can keep me, and my superiors, *and* the State Department guessing. In which case this ship continues exactly as before. Collecting marine animals. Punching holes in the sea bed. Pushing ice around . . . while one Mr. Lawick-Smyth *enjoys our hospitality.*"

"I think that would be fascinating," said Lawick-Smyth.

As the projector whirred to life, Ensign Beck focused the image. The 16-mm. film was in black and white — a sea print of a technicolor original. In it, a man with a 40s haircut stumbled out onto a London street to chase a tram.

"It's World War II, supposedly," said the exec. "That's one of the Nazis. Now watch the guy coming up. The hero."

The next actor carried an umbrella and wore a deerstalker. James Bond *cum* Sherlock Holmes. Even as he recognized the face, Farrell smiled. "Let me guess," he said. "Hero's name: Lawick-Smyth, right?"

"You got it, Captain." The exec was being overly vigorous in stubbing out his cigarette.

The captain lowered his head. To the others, he appeared to be giving his undivided attention to the carpet. "Has the film been shown yet?"

"Yes, sir," answered Beck. "That's how I caught the resemblance. It was playing the mess deck last night."

"Last *night!*" Farrell looked up sharply. "How many were there?"

"Most of those off watch, sir."

Over a hundred and fifty men, thought Farrell. "Any comment so far?"

"Some," said the exec, "but just over his . . . *costume*; not about this idiot cover name. The crew hasn't heard it. To *them* he's Mr. Polar Bear. The guys in the wardroom know the name — but they haven't seen the film."

"Good. Let's keep it that way. From now on I want a guard on the door. I want a second guard, *armed*, at the end of the passageway. And a talker with him. Understood?"

When the men had left, Captain Farrell sat at his desk, unmoving. He didn't buy the exec's interpretation. The name could not be a cover, at least not in the ordinary sense.

The G.R.U. — constructing a legend around a Hollywood film?

Impossible!

Yet . . . how much sense was there to any of the rest of it? The hat. The umbrella.

He wasn't positive about the hat, but he'd be willing to swear an oath . . . *that umbrella had been a walking stick!* The range had been a mere hundred yards; the ship had been stopped; the binoculars had been steady.

Slowly, he unlatched the sound-powered phone and pushed the water-tight button. *A gunstock mount with a telephoto lens.*

"Bridge, aye," squawked the receiver.

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"This is the captain. Get hold of the photographer."

The loudspeaker in the corridor blatted, and a minute later the photographer's mate arrived. "Yes-sir. Shot a couple of rolls. The negs are drying right now, but I can have prints ready . . ."

"*No*," said the captain. "I'll go with you."

He hadn't lost his skill in a darkroom. Alone, he made a series of enlargements. They confirmed what he had seen in negative. Frame number three showed not only a trooper's hat, but a Soviet assault rifle as well. In frame eighteen, the hat became a deerstalker. Last came the walking stick.

A walking stick soon to evolve into an umbrella.

In the hours that followed, he debated notifying the district. But decided against it. Those ashore couldn't be expected to credit such a report. Admiral Kremen would simply order the ship to Barrow — and schedule a padded cell for her captain.

The photos?

Too easily faked. Not enough of them. No witnesses.

Never before had Captain Farrell felt so alone.

He began keeping a diary.

"It alters molecular structures at will," he wrote. "It is psychic. And chameleonic — using collective mental images for its pattern.

"Talked with it again last evening. The creature is aloof, vague, passive. Makes no complaint over its confinement.

"Perhaps this tone of mild discourtesy toward me is its reaction to authority. After all, it has its origin with a group of enlisted men. One would expect a simulacrum of this kind to reflect the attitudes of the pattern makers."

Farrell's pen had hardly lifted from the page when, without knocking, the exec burst in. The man panted as if he'd taken the ladder at a dead run.

"Captain! . . . You're going to think I'm off my *nut*, sir! . . ." The officer ran a shaking hand across his face. Incongruously, the other hand clutched a large industrial calendar. Farrell recognized it as having come from the after tool room. In bold letters, a shapely young blonde was identified as Miss Crescent Wench.

"Let me guess," said Captain Farrell. He rose to place the diary inside the safe, shut the metal door, spun the dial to disguise the last numeral of the combination. "Our Mr. Smyth has vanished. Right?"

The exec nodded, and kept on nodding. Like a mechanical toy.

"And in the Englishman's place," the captain went on, "we now have a *female* guest."

The nodding stopped. Farrell had the impression the man's breathing had stopped as well.

He took his executive officer by the elbow and turned him to face the door. "Come on. Let's take a look, shall we?"

They passed the phone talker and first guard, continuing down a passageway floored with green tile. The sailor at the door scrambled quickly from

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his chair. "Good morning, Captain."

"Morning, Redruth. Anything unusual?"

"Uh . . . *no*-sir!" The guard's eyes swiveled for a moment to the calendar in the exec's hand.

"Very well. You're relieved for the moment. You can stand by with the others."

He tapped softly at the metal pannel. "This is Captain Farrell." He waited. "May I come in?"

"Certainly, Captain." The girlish voice had an odd echo to it.

He opened the door. Inside the stateroom, *two* Miss Crescent Wenches sat cross-legged on the bunk, facing each other. They were playing a game of cribbage.

"Oh, hell!" groaned the exec. "Another one."

The two young women smiled innocently up at them. They were heart-robbingly lovely, and as naked as a pair of eggs.

"Bound to get out, Captain," said Executive Officer Payne that evening. "You can't keep that sort of thing quiet. Not aboard ship, sir." He took another mouthful of steak.

"No, I suppose not," replied the captain, absently. He occupied himself with rearrangements of his knife and fork; he hadn't been able to eat.

"Coffee, sir?" asked the steward.

"Yes! Coffee!" He might be able to handle that.

"How many *now*, Payne?" he said, when they were alone.

The exec merely shook his head. "Get us out of here, Captain," he said. "We've got to start back. *Now*, sir!"

"And what rationale do you suggest presenting to Admiral Kremen?"

"The truth, sir."

Farrell laughed sourly and put down his cup. He *hadn't* been able to handle it.

"To: Commandant 13th District. From: C.O. *Boreas*," he said, composing the message aloud. "As of 1830 this date, ship's complement has increased by 16 actresses, 20 Playmates of the Month, 5 calendar girls, a country-western vocalist . . ."

Abashed, the exec looked at his plate. "Still, Captain. The sooner we get back the better."

"Are you *certain* of that, Commander?"

"Well . . . the sooner we have help . . ."

"You're thinking only of *us*. What of the four billion others on the planet? *Neither of us knows what we* have *aboard here yet!*" He lowered his voice. "It's possible we shouldn't . . . *go* back."

From the direction of the cabin galley came a trill of highpitched Tagalog, and a woman's laugh. This was followed by *shushing* noises.

"Jesus," said Commander Payne. "Even your stewards."

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"And why not?" Farrell's tone was one of resignation. "There's certainly nothing in the U.C.M.J. that forbids *thinking* about women."

The exec scowled at the galley door. "Mark my words, Captain. If this goes on, discipline'll be *impossible* to maintain. *Impossible!*"

But the executive officer was mistaken. The day-to-day operation of the ship remained unchanged. If anything, the men stood their watches with greater discipline than ever. For his part, Farrell turned a blind eye toward much of the off-duty behavior, which, by unspoken agreement, was amazingly decorous.

On the surface at least.

He held a muster of all on board, twice a day; within the week, the ship's population had stabilized.

For every two males — three females.

Each of them a sailor's dream.

At mealtimes they packed the mess deck and the wardroom. They stood in long lines, waiting with an even-tempered patience — an inhuman patience — for the product of an overworked galley. During the long arctic evenings, groups of people, twos and threes, could be seen topside in sheltered corners of the 01, or below the flight deck, aft. Whenever he caught a glimpse of non-regulation-length hair escaping the hood of a parka, or a slender hand withdrawn from an arctic mitten, Farrell unfocused his eyes and bleakly went his way.

He felt increasingly distressed by the sight of these pseudo women: these impostors. They were bland, agreeable, willing to put up with any inconvenience. He couldn't understand how his men could tolerate such nonentities. These were not *women*, but two-dimensional puppets. The very thought of associating with them was odious to him.

At night now, he hardly slept. It had become a time of repetitive, half-wakeful dreams in which ordinary things became menacing. In one of the dreams he had dinner with his family. Claudia gave Jason a lesson in how to use a fork. Then a second Claudia appeared. They made room for her at the table, everyone being extremely polite — even when a third Claudia arrived; and a second version of himself; and a duplicate of Jason . . . and one of Pamela.

He wanted to say: "This is not right!" But every time he opened his mouth, a buzzing noise emerged. The sound of the phone on the bulkhead.

Forcing himself awake, he answered. "*Yes?*"

"Captain, this is Doctor Simmons." A squawk like a parrot. "I'm calling from sick bay. One of our . . . *passengers* fell down a ladder. Compound fracture. Left tibia. The reason I called . . ." The man broke off, whispering heatedly to someone else.

Farrell turned on the lamp. The clock said 0210. *Boreas* shuddered and rumbled across the ice field, invisible now, in the dark.

"We're getting an atypic reaction to the local," the doctor continued. "I

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thought you might like to observe."

"All right," said Farrell. "I'll be right down."

In the corridor to sick bay stood an elderly chief petty officer, dressed only in undershirt, trousers and shower shoes. The man gazed stupidly at the closed door, as if unsure of what to do. Farrell pushed past him and entered. Within, the ship's pharmacist's mate sat at a desk, typing. Doctor Simmons stood near by, casually trimming his nails with a long-handled pair of scissors. There was no one else in the room; the inner door, the one to the surgery, had been shut.

"Got you out of bed for nothing, I'm afraid," said the doctor. He put down his scissors, reached over the corpsman's shoulder, yanked the sheet of paper from the machine.

"Beat it," he muttered; the corpsman scurried for the corridor.

"Jones has been kind enough to transcribe his scrawl for us," continued the doctor, handing the paper across. "That's the extent of it. Couldn't get any more out of her."

The interrogation had been brief.

Question: Why hellish?

Answer: Only word. No other word.

Q: You mean the treatment? You're not in pain are you?

A: It is hellish.

Q: What is?

A: All.

Q: All of what?

A: World. Hellish world.

Q: Why?

A: [Unintelligible.]

Q: What's the matter with it?

A: Slavery. No choices. Hellish.

Q: How are you enslaved?

A: [Unintelligible.]

Q: How are you enslaved?

A: Doctor! [Laughs.] You're playing *doctor* with me! [Laughter.] Oh! You should see your face! *Funny* man.

Q. That's all for this, Jones. Let's see what you've got.

Farrell read the sheet twice, folded it, put it in his pocket. "I gather your patient has recovered."

Simmons closed his eyes in a slow blink. "Completely," he said, and gave a lopsided smile. "First time I've seen *any* injury — let alone a serious one — heal itself in twenty-five seconds." The doctor looked down at the palm of his hand. He closed the fingers into a fist, opened them, closed them. "Bleeding stopped. Everything just . . . pulled back together."

Farrell looked toward the surgery door. "She still in there?"

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"Yep."

"All right, Simmons," said the captain. "This is where you and I get down to business."

The doctor looked up, a glint in his eye. He placed his hands firmly to either side, gripping the edge of the desk. "No, Captain. I don't think so."

"You haven't heard me out yet."

"But I'm way ahead of you. It's worked *once* — that's what you're thinking. Maybe it'll work again. Get her high, and you have a minute or two before she accommodates to the new compound. Then you hit her with another. And another. There's all this *stuff* in there — that's what you're thinking. All you got to do is get little ol' Doc, here, to go along!"

They glared at each other.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to insist," said Farrell.

"And are you willing to put it in writing?"

"If necessary."

"*Good!* Then I'll put my reasons for refusal in writing as well! Chapter and verse!"

"What are you talking about?"

"*Ethics*, Captain. Medical — ethics. It's one of the things Nuremberg was all about. Or have you forgotten?"

Tight-lipped, Farrell brought out the folded paper, held it up. "*This*, Doctor, was obtained with the aid of what — if memory serves — was referred to as a *local*."

"Yes. In the course of an attempt at treatment directed exclusively toward the healing of the patient. Not as an experiment. The information was totally serendipitous."

"Damn it, Simmons! We're not dealing with *humans!*"

"They're human enough for me! They're so human I can't tell the difference! Great God in Heaven! I've done every test available! Bloods, cultures, you name it. Human all the way. Identical. If I had the solutes to do a metaphase spread, there'd be two Xs there for every one of them. No doubt in my mind at all."

"And an injury that takes a *human* six months to recover from . . . repairs itself in twenty-five seconds?"

"Since when has the ability to heal — oneself or others — ever been *less* than human?" retorted the doctor. He whipped off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "No, Captain. No way."

Farrell wanted to reach out and shake the man: to shout at him; to make him *see*. Every person loved by either of them was at risk. If this ship, this Typhoid Mary of a steel container came in contact with so much as *one* other unit, ship or sub, the game was up. The contagion would spread. They'd have lost all chance of stopping it.

It was a terrifying thought. Enough to make a man contemplate that which was *un*thinkable to every ship's captain. The ultimate betrayal. The

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ultimate violation of the trust placed in him by his crew.

A calculated scuttling.

Without survivors.

But no — of course.

On the sick bay shelves, glassware clinked as the ship struck hard ice, swerving. Farrell and the doctor seemed to be bowing to each other, like awkward marionettes. Two people, trying to stand in an earthquake.

"Your arguments are valid, Doctor," said Farrell quietly. He crossed to the surgery door, but with his hand on the knob, he saw alarm in the other's eyes. The captain forced a smile. "Don't worry, Simmons. You've convinced me."

He entered the surgery; shut the door; rested his back against it.

This one seemed more alert than the others. Short, dark hair. A quizzical tilt to the face. She lay on her side on the high table. Full, rounded girl-shape beneath a tight green skirt. Knees bent, leading to smooth, youthful calves. Bare feet.

She propped herself up on one elbow. "You're the skipper, huh?" A husky, sensual voice.

"Captain Farrell. Yes."

"I'm Tammy. Actually, though, my friends call me Ginger." She grinned. "I had a name once — nobody liked it. *Clarissa*." A grimace. "Awful, huh?"

Here was something new. The others hadn't initiated conversation.

He said: "You mentioned . . . discomfort. A while back. You said you didn't like it here. You found it . . . *hellish*."

"Huh?" a look of incredulity.

"You said you felt enslaved. Unable to make choices. You indicated extreme . . . distress."

Her expression was that of a wise child. "Honey! I — have — it — *made!*" She sat up, her eyes level with his. "Listen. I'm on my *own*, lover. One hundred percent! I don't split with *anybody*. Know what I mean?"

She described her apartment to him. She told him of the hours she kept, of the clothing she owned, of the morning baths, and of the sorts of things one did to make the day pass. She hadn't gone the drugs, she said. That was for suckers. She'd seen what happened — shared book with girls who went that route. It began to show, always. You went to hell, couldn't keep up your appearance. Ended doing the street. You went from the honey tickets to the fifties. Then lower than that. Always lower. More tricks: four, five, six a night. Just to stay even.

For Captain Farrell, another section of the jigsaw had begun to fill in. He saw that he'd been in error. The blandness, the passivity he'd observed had been created by the men themselves. After all, what could one expect from a bunch of seaman apprentices? His crew was made up of boys, for the most part. And the boys of the *Boreas* had got exactly what they ordered. Ravishingly beautiful play toys. Nothing more.

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Yet here was little Tammy-Ginger, behaving in a more human way than several hundred of her mass-produced sisters. True, the real Tammy-Ginger, the one earning her living in Seattle, would not be as open as this. She'd be more likely to play the lady. But still . . . this particular simulation was far better than any he'd seen before. It showed the difference between the younger hands and the career men.

Farrell thought of the chief he'd seen in the corridor.

Where the youngsters had used films and calendars and boyish fantasies, the old chief had patterned his creation on a woman personally known to him.

It made a difference.

"Hey!" said Tammy-Ginger. "I hear you've got the only *real* drinks on the boat. Up in that room of yours." She leaned forward. And as the doctor had said, one couldn't tell the difference. "Skippy-Baby, I'd do *anything* for a drink."

Captain Farrell smiled, though a trifle sadly. "Perhaps another time, Ginger. Some other time, all right?"

He turned to leave.

"Hey! No skin off *my* nose. I mean, I can relate to that. So you like little *boys*. That's OK."

He didn't bother to answer.

"In the space of a single morning," wrote Farrell, "my thinking has swung one hundred and eighty. Much is clear now. These beings are neither calculating nor malevolent, however terrible their presence may prove to be. As I see it, *we* are not the ones imposed upon — it's the other way around.

"Imagine a creature for whom sexual reproduction is foreign, for whom the only *natural* way is to reshape molecules — from a distance. Such a species might well be defenseless in the face of mammalian sexual intensity. A woman-hungry sailor would be a monstrous threat — the carrier of a psychic distemper, a virus of the mind, capable of usurping the reproductive processes of others. . . ."

He put down the pen, trying to imagine what it would be like — to be forced to reproduce. Uncontrollably. In the image of another species.

Hellish indeed.

Still, one couldn't help but smile. There was an element of sniggering farce in the thought of the high-flying scout, brought crashing to the Laptev by a dreaming, Siberian virgin.

A new form of ground-to-air.

It would explain why Lawick-Smyth had been a soldier, when first sighted. The imprint received above Siberia had been supplanted by the imagery of a spy film, as *Boreas* approached. Farrell himself had witnessed part of the transition, the change in props. From one hat to another: from a

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rifle to a walking stick. The simulation had been refined still further once the man arrived aboard; the stick had become . . .

Farrell went rigid. Quickly, he began writing: "The effect of human thought upon these creatures is directly related to *distance*."

The inverse-square rule.

He was still mulling over the implications when a quartermaster came to make the noon report. Afterward, Farrell put on his parka and went outside. He paced the length of the 01, blinking in the glare of the ice field. "At least," he said to himself, "there's still time."

He heard the striking of eight bells — another part of the noon ritual — and half an hour after that, Commander Payne found him, still pacing.

"All hands accounted for at muster, Captain," said the exec. "No drills scheduled."

"Very good," said Farrell. The sunlight and the cold air had improved his outlook. "An unusual number," he said. "Have you noticed?"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"The bears. A week ago, if we'd come across so many, there'd have been a hundred cameras clicking away. So far I haven't seen a one!" He chuckled. "The power of *distraction*, I suppose."

The exec wasn't interested in the bears. "Lieutenant Vatcher says some of his troublemakers have been getting together. Sort of a *séance* routine. Down in berthing."

"Well," said Farrell, "it'll be interesting to see what comes of it."

Commander Payne wiped at the frosted railing with the side of an insulated mitt. "Hell, Captain!" he said suddenly. "Sooner or later they're going to realize — they don't have to stick with *pin-up* girls!"

"What of it? Lawick-Smyth did no harm."

"Suppose, Captain. Suppose I wake up tomorrow . . ." Payne took a breath as though preparing for a dive, ". . . and I find there's *twelve* of you, sir. *Which of the twelve do I obey?*"

Farrell examined the idea. The man had a point.

"Should the question arise," replied Farrell, "the *first* word of a command will begin with the initial letter of whatever day of the week it happens to be. All right?"

The exec said nothing for a time; finally he nodded. "Aye aye, sir," he growled. "But mark my words, Captain! They're up to *something!*"

That same day, shortly after 1400, Commander Payne entered Farrell's cabin, bringing with him a walking, breathing copy of Lieutenant Vatcher. Physically, the reproduction was perfect, right down to the freshly pressed uniform. The cabal of the berth deck, however, had been in a whimsical mood; the Vatcher replica was autistic. This awkward, slack-jawed parody of an officer had to be led in by the hand. And throughout the discussion of what should be done, the creature amused itself by repeatedly slapping its

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own face, and making tongue-popping noises.

Revolted — shaken — Farrell ordered it confined. When he had the cabin to himself again, he brought out the diary to record the event.

He couldn't control the pen.

Before him, the page lay open. *The effect of human thought upon these creatures is directly related to* distance.

When those words had been written, just over two hours before, he'd expected to have a minimum of six weeks.

The margin had vanished. There'd never *been* a margin.

Thoughtfully, he took up the ivory carving of the polar bears. He remembered how Lawick-Smyth had derided their protruding tongues. But the Eskimo carver had been an artist after all. The bears had a ferocity in their mating that transcended the childishly painted tongues. The male bear mounted the female from behind, his forepaws resting on the female's back.

Six paws to the ice.

Holding the little carving in his hands, Captain Farrell made his plan.

The two hundred men of the *Boreas* stood on the ice, watching their ship depart.

Only minutes before, they had known heated air, artificial light, insulated bulkheads. Now they'd be building their own ice shelters: against the wind and the coming of night.

From the bridge, the men looked vulnerable and forlorn, shrinking with distance. Farrell silently made a pledge; the *ship* would return, even if he did not.

Steering with engines alone, he headed westward — toward a pale sun, hanging like a glowing coin near the horizon. At first he followed the lane of broken ice created earlier by the ship's passage. But after a time, the pack fell astern; the ship gathered speed across the open water.

The arctic sun had begun to set before he found the place he wanted. In the evening light, the great floe seemed more jagged and formidable than it had at noon.

Slowly, softly, the ship's angled prow slid onto an icy ledge. With the lip of the floe squealing to starboard, *Boreas* canted slightly and came to rest, the exhaust of her idling diesels muttering quietly inside the stack.

Captain Farrell went down the after ladder, feeling guilty: never, during all the months of the voyage, had his bridge been left unattended like this. The feeling passed as he entered the hangar. Here, the hundreds of non-women made a human-seeming warmth. They sat on the pontoons of the helicopters, on the work benches, on the deck. The exec and the photographer were there as well, like a pair of bright-eyed sheep dogs, tending a flock.

"All right, everyone," said Farrell, his voice ringing from the metal walls. "We're going to put the gangway over. We'll need some extra muscle to do

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it. You . . . you . . . you. Come with us."

Twenty minutes later, the task was done. The Marilyn Monroes and Princess Genevieves, the pin-up girls and country-western singers strolled the ice.

All but one.

Petite, green-skirted Tammy-Ginger stood at the head of the gangway, smoking a cigarette.

"The inboard end has been lashed," explained Farrell. "It can't fall, as long as the ship is in close to the ice."

"Yeah. Well. I don't like those albino bears out there, either. They don't look safe at all!"

"They're five, six hundred yards off," said the captain. "And it's mating season. They're not interested in us."

"So? What if they decide to have their little party over *here?*"

"Then you can come back aboard," said Farrell.

Tammy-Ginger raised a skeptical eyebrow. She looked from the three hundred women on the ice, to the narrow gangway; obviously calculating what a general panic might do to her chances.

"We're also putting over a couple of Jacob's ladders," said Farrell reassuringly. "And a cargo net."

A plume of tobacco smoke went out. "Well. Whatever you say, lover boy," said Tammy-Ginger. Flicking her cigarette over the rail, she sauntered down the long walkway to the ice.

Commander Payne arrived with the Vatcher copy. The exec pushed the non-lieutenant onto the gangplank. "Go!" he ordered.

"HOON-N-N," said the creature. The end of his uniform tie was in his mouth. He was sucking on it.

The exec put his hand on the thing's back, and pushed. The creature went flapping and stumbling from the ship, then stood a few yards off, gazing at the sky.

Working quickly, Farrell and the exec suspended the Jacob's ladders and the cargo net from the rail. Aft, the photographer set up his motion-picture and still cameras. At the photographer's request, Farrell allowed the deck-floods to be aimed toward the ice — but not, as yet, switched on.

Commander Payne waited until they were on the bridge, out of the other man's hearing, before voicing his disapproval. "Turn on those lights, Captain, and you'll have bears over for supper. Pull 'em like a magnet."

"Perhaps," said Farrell, nettled by the man's attitude.

The exec inserted three large-caliber rounds into the breach of his rifle, carefully holding the last one down as he closed the bolt. The safety made a snapping sound.

Farrell scanned the ice with his binoculars. Bright clothing; the tumbled surface of the floe. Beyond, he saw the undulating mass of a bear. Several of the animals lay together. Their behavior reminded Farrell of a pride of

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sleepy lions.

Frozen sea water, not veldt. Temperature a hundred degrees lower.

"I think we ought to call 'em back aboard, Captain. In half an hour or so," said the exec. "Hate to have to give cover fire in poor light."

"There's a crib board in Combat, isn't there? And a pack of cards?" murmured the captain.

Payne glanced across, warily. "Yes, sir," he said.

Farrell summoned the photographer to the bridge. "You and the commander are going to be playing cribbage," he told him. "Down in CIC."

The combat information center had no windows.

"But . . . I don't know how to *play* cribbage," protested the photographer.

"Commander Payne will teach you."

As the footsteps of the two men faded away on the ladder, Farrell let out the strap of the exec's rifle and slung the weapon over his shoulder. Unlooked for, a phrase from Homer had come to him:

Your hollow ship.

It had a chilling sound to him now, for *Boreas* was indeed a hollow ship. He had men in engine rooms 2 and 3. An electrician in the motor room. Counting the others and himself, it made a total of six.

Six men, in a ship designed for two hundred.

The ventilators hummed. The radars turned. And in all the empty spaces, the lights burned.

Should a fire start . . .

No, he reminded himself. It would be dangerous to imagine such a thing, with creatures such as these near by.

"Hallo!" called a familiar voice from below. "I say! Could you give a chap a lift?" Lawick-Smyth, complete with deerstalker and walking stick, stood on the ice.

"Not just yet," Farrell called down. "Wait a while."

"Right-o," said Lawick-Smyth. He turned and walked away, his stick making indentations in the sugary crust. The man paused near a hummock, prodded at something with the stick, strolled on. The prodded object turned out to be an infant polar bear. As the little bear rose to its feet, Farrell saw that it was not a baby after all, but more the size of a juvenile.

He unslung the rifle.

The young bear followed in Lawick-Smyth's footsteps, sniffing. The man must have heard, for he turned. The bear came closer. A long, outstretched neck; a narrow, tapering head. The bear acted like a large, friendly dog. A *very* large dog.

Large, in fact, even for a bear.

Enormous.

Lawick-Smyth waggled his stick. "Buzz off."

Farrell was never to learn whether or not the animal obeyed. His attention was distracted by a stuttering roar. A Soviet trooper had fired a half-second

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burst into the chest of yet another bear. The animal sat down, groaning. It tried to lick its front. A big, cumbersome child with a red bib. Then it got up. It reared, walking on its hind legs, trundling toward the soldier. The man emptied the weapon's magazine. No dice. The red splotches vanished as soon as they appeared. A single blow of a paw slammed the soldier down. But he picked himself up and ran away on all fours, like a wolf.

Motion everywhere. It had the sound of a country fair, the smell of a meat locker. Laughter. Shots. Bellowing and dancing. Games of pop the whip. Tag.

Bears by the dozen. A girl in a parka clung to a broad, woolly back, riding. Others threw away their clothing. Leapt. Ran. Embraced.

Naked, a solitary Marilyn Monroe bathed at the edge of the ice. She ignored the uproar, gracefully ladling sea water over herself, a handful at a time.

Farrell came to himself. The rifle hurt his hands as he gripped it. He put the weapon aside. More bears than people now. If he didn't capture some of it on film he might later find himself accused of murder.

Mass murder.

He made for the stern, running. On the 01, he tripped. Picking himself from the deck, he ran again. At the fantail, he started the 16-mm. rolling, and the Hassellblad. A video camera lay on a box. He picked it up and went forward: aiming, triggering, moving on. He concentrated on holding the camera steady. He used a stanchion for a brace. Below, a bear looked up at him. He got it on tape. The toothed mouth. The black nose.

He moved aft again. The bear followed. It was stalking him. Too late, he realized he'd led it to the wrong place. The animal started climbing the gangway.

In a breath, it seemed, he was on the bridge. He had no memory of going there. The levers of the engine controls were in his hands. He pushed them forward to the stops.

Not forward! Aft! Full astern!

He reversed the levers. The diesels faltered . . . then thundered anew. The ship pounded to the beat of the screws. He looked aft. The bear had reached the top. It paused. The ship was moving. Screeching, the metal gangway dragged against the ice, angling forward. The bear pushed its shoulders against the last pair of stanchions. They bent inward. But as they did so, the ship canted and swung. Water appeared alongside. The base of the gangway slid toward the edge of the ice . . . and fell.

The bear fell with it, leaping free with astonishing agility, diving into the water.

Boreas pulled clear of the floe. Farrell killed the sternway, went to all stop. The ship became an island of quiet. A hundred yards away, the frenzy continued. Then it lessened. Soon, few people were left. An army of white bears inhabited the ice. They milled, bawling, trampling the litter of cast-off

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clothing, empty rifles. In the failing light, the splotches of blood looked purple.

Farrell called his witnesses to the bridge.

Shortly after nightfall, the *Boreas* approached the ice once more. The exec swung the searchlight back and forth, probing the shambles. Already, the bears had dispersed. No human shape remained.

The sound of the diesels echoed back from the ice as *Boreas* got under way.

"We have *our* freedom," said the captain. "Before long, they'll have theirs." In the sweep of the light, the reflection of golden eyes could be seen. The floe glided away astern. "Perhaps their own kind will be able to rescue them," continued Farrell. "If not . . . then at least they're no worse off than they were — after the crash."

"How in *blazes* do you figure that, Captain?" demanded the exec. He cut the searchlight as if pulling the switch on an electric chair. "They're *bears* now. When the freeze-up comes, they'll go ashore. Along with the others. We'll be back where we started! Only worse!"

"No," said Farrell.

"*Yes!*" shouted the exec. "This hasn't helped! It *will* not help!"

"You're forgetting something, Commander."

"*What* am I forgetting!"

"The fact that they revert. When free of mammalian imagery — *sexual* imagery."

Payne snorted. "And how are they supposed to *escape?* This time. From a bunch of *animals*."

"By waiting," said Farrell.

The exec looked at him.

"Humans are overtly sexual. Year-round," said the captain. "Bears aren't."

Under the stars, the hollow ship ran eastward to find her people.

BLACK HOLE LIMBO

the infinite
collapses
into the
imper
cep
ti
ble

— Peter Payack

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BUT WAIT!



THERE'S MORE!



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by Walter J. Stutzman and Esther M. Friesner
art: Jack Gaughan

The human hand can split boards, but watch how clumsy it is severing this ogre's head. Yee-uch! What a mess. But now spontaneous beheading is no problem with WUNDA-SWORD. Dices, slices, reduces to little gobs of ichor. Makes julienne fries. Used by freebooters everywhere and comes with plunder-back guarantee.

AND . . . if you order now we'll throw in, *absolutely free*, this genuine Orcahide breechclout. Resists bloodstains, gets soaked with gore but looks like new with just the wipe of a sponge. You'll be proud to stride into battle wearing this handsome and functional garment. How much would you pay for all this?

Well, hold onto your hilts, folks, because . . . IN ADDITION you get the fantastic patented SCALE-AWAY dragon-skinner. No more messy scales on the scullery-wench's floor.

NOW how much would you pay? 20 gold pieces? 50? 100? Ha, ha! Rongzu the Barbarian Enterprises spits on your sandals and offers you WUNDA-SWORD, breechclout, and SCALE-AWAY for the amazingly low price of only **10 GOLD PIECES** plus two prepaid maidens. Order yours today!

You may already have won! *Raider's Digest* offers you the chance to own the conquered city of your dreams. But you have to enter to win. Here's what Mubragh the Magnificent has to say:

"Last year me get scroll from *Raider's Digest*. Me send back. Me win. Now me got city. Plenty gold. Plenty dancing girls. You betcha. Me still be dumb barbarian if me not send back scroll."

The Queen of Air and Darkness is dead . . . but her music lives on for you in this handsome collection of MORGAN LE FAY'S GREATEST HITS. Hear the incantations that made her famous. Sway to the romantic strains of "Mistletoe Mama," "That Old Golden Sickle," and "Stonehenge Rock." Let Llyr and his All-Druid Chorus take you back to those days of young love, fast chariots, woad, and human sacrifice. It's an album full of hits you'll always remember at a price you'll never forget. Call now. Not sold in any marketplace. It frightens the cows.

IF U CAN SMN THS DMN, U CAN ERN BG BUX. LRN SPD NCRMNCY N UR SPR TM. MPRS UR FRNDS. MT VRGNS.

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Little Cthulhu has never owned a teddy bear. Every night he goes to sleep in sunken R'lyeh not knowing whether tomorrow will bring release and world dominion or more of the same. But now, you can help little Cthulhu and dozens of Elder Gods like him. Just send your sacrifices and incantations to BRING BACK THE EVIL ELDER GODS and make tomorrow a brighter, tastier day for our tentacled friends. Remember, you can raise Cthulhu, or you can turn the page.

PLAGUED BY WHAT TO DO WITH LEFTOVER BALROG? COMPANY COMING AND ALL YOU'VE GOT TO SERVE IS COLD SLICED CLERIC? LET THE POWERS OF DARKNESS HELP YOU! WITHIN MINUTES THE LITTLE CERBERUS CONVECTION CAULDRON CAN TRANSFORM NAMELESS HORRORS INTO A MEAL FIT FOR AZATHOTH. ONLY $22.98 PLUS YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL. IN CONNECTICUT ADD SALES TAX.

"OH, AMATHAR, YOU'RE BACK! AT LAST, MY LOVE, YOU — AK! YOU'VE GOT RING-OF-POWER AROUND THE KINGDOM!"

THOSE NASTY RINGS. . . . YOU'VE TRIED SWORDS ON THEM. YOU'VE TRIED SORCERY. NOW TRY GRISK! THE ONLY DWARF-LORD GUARANTEED TO UNMAKE ACCURSED RINGS IN NO TIME FLAT. HIRE GRISK AND NEVER BE TROUBLED WITH HACKNEYED ENCHANTED-JEWELRY PLOT DEVICES AGAIN.

"I'm a princess, and I don't normally go around talking about unicorns, but just between us virgins we know that sometimes being pure isn't enough. You know. . . . That's why virgins everywhere swear by DAMSELFRESH. . . ."

"I lost twenty-seven hundred pounds and never went hungry once!" . . . *Henry Fafnir, freelance dragon, Pachogue —*

Are *you* a dumpy dragon? A waddling wyvern? A chubby chimera? Do heroes who come seeking to slay you exit laughing? When was the last time you managed to squeeze that scaly rump of yours into a really classy cave? Could you get out again?

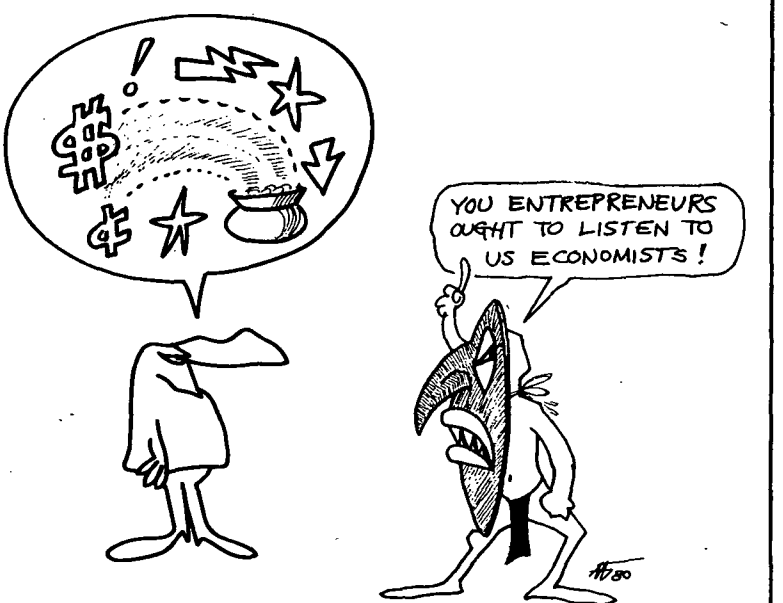
DON'T FRET! There's hope for you with the new, incredible WIZARD'S SECRET DIET. Developed by a noted necromancer, this diet lets you eat the foods you love . . . **EVEN MAIDENS!** . . . yet lose up to a hog's-load of lard a week. Just send half your treasure-hoard to WIZARD'S SECRET BOX 666, today!

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We're looking for people who like to curse. If you can draw the pentagram in this ad, famous Sorcerers' School wants to hear from you. Act now. No demon will call.

Phone now. Elves are standing by.

CARTOON **CARTOON**



William Rotsler **Alexis Gilliland**

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Film Reviews

by Baird Searles

Me Greystoke

It is strange and wonderful to me that my opening column for *Amazing® Stories* should be on a movie derived from the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs, since ERB's writings have been so much a part of the great past of the magazine. (And, for that matter, a personal note . . . it is strange and wonderful to me to be writing for *Amazing® Stories*, since it was my introduction to the genre of SF many years ago, when I was but a little shaver [a clue to the period there, for *Amz* historians].)

Greystoke is half a great picture and half a very good picture, which is fairly extraordinary given the garbage we've been getting lately on the big screen. In all fairness, it should be stated where this review is coming from — like many of my generation, I cut my teeth on the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs. This does not necessarily make me a purist, however; I find the Tarzan films endlessly diverting (little as almost all of them have to do with the original literary source) as variations on a theme, if for no other reason.

The character as handled by script writers has been about everything except female, black, or Oriental (and there have been imitations which took care of *those* options). There was a featurette made in the '30s, for instance, with Shirley Temple in a pith helmet about to be boiled in a large kettle (well, middle-sized kettle) as the dinner of some juvenile cannibals; she is rescued by a young man who couldn't have been more than three-and-a-half, suitably clad in a leopard skin but barely able to toddle, much less swing from trees. (This was back in the days when children were considered cute rather than inevitable subjects for exorcism.)

The other, more adult (?) screen Tarzans have been a mixed lot indeed, with a wide variance from the endearing stereotype established by Johnny Weissmuller. They have been inarticulate (Weissmuller), simply laconic (Gordon Scott), and very sophisticated (Herman Brix, who looked great in a tuxedo, left the screen after his two Tarzan films in the '30s to learn acting, and returned as Bruce Bennett, highly competent supporting actor in films such as *Mildred Pierce*).

Despite the tendency to put star athletes in the role (which strengthened the reasons for keeping the dialogue delivery to a minimum), the Tarzans have also varied physically. There was a blond (Lex Barker) and an even blonder (Dennis Miller, cast in the days of the teen-age idols *à la* Tab Hunter); there was even one that bore a strong and unfortunate resemblance to Harpo Marx (decathlon star Glenn Morris).

And, of course, there was that unfortunate, unbalanced effort of a couple of years back that should have been called *Jane*, which was like a remake of *King Kong* with a giant Fay Wray holding a tiny ape in her hand.

But with all these variations on a

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theme, and despite the author's own participation in some of the films, Burroughs's Tarzan has never been portrayed on screen, as those who have read the books know full well. Though considered simple-minded, period escapism by some these days, Burroughs was a master story teller (with, admittedly, a rather primitive writing style and a great reliance on coincidence as a plot device) and a creator of rather complex situations and cultures, ranging from the complicated geography of Barsoom to the ape society of the *mangani*, the species Burroughs invented in *Tarzan*. The movies have been truly simple-minded affairs, built on the not-so-simple situation created in the books. To encapsulate swiftly, Tarzan is the son of the Earl of Greystoke, conceived and born to his parents while they are marooned on the wild African coast. They both die soon after his birth; and he is adopted by the female *mangani*, Kala, and raised by the ape tribe. The *mangani* are somewhat between the gorilla and the chimpanzee, almost equalling the strength of the former and even more intelligent than the latter.

Growing up with the apes, Tarzan masters the physical demands of the jungle and exercises his superior mental ability to become the leader of the *mangani* and (you got it) "Lord of the Jungle." "Rescued" and returned to civilization, he adapts readily to the human jungle, becomes at ease in the *haute monde*, and eventually assumes his title. But he then goes back to Africa to essentially have the best of both worlds, using his wealth to build a jungle retreat from which he ventures to generate twenty-three sequels (not counting those unauthorized, and movie novelizations).

(It should be noted that the films in which Herman Brix portrayed Tarzan did show him as a man of the world, but did not tackle his origins.)

Now finally a film has dared to be true to Burroughs, and has done it intelligently and beautifully. *Greystoke* is amazing — and not only because, after 70 years of simplistic variations, one finds it hard to believe that anyone would have the courage to put the theme on the screen, much less convincing the money people to put up the dough. (One envisions the conversations with potential backers: "We want to do a *new* Tarzan movie." "Sure. Sure." "But this one will be the *real* Tarzan." "Sure. Sure." And so on.)

The first half of the film deals with Tarzan's coming of age in the jungle. It dispenses, necessarily, with much of the detail with which Burroughs imbued the novel; here again we run into the differences between what words can explain and pictures can show, but the pictures are *right*. It is one of those rare times when one sees, brought to life, the pictures one has created in one's head while reading. There's also intelligence at work here; subtly introduced is much that has been learned about animal behaviorism since Burroughs's time. The *mangani* are superbly recreated; incredibly realistically done, they are still not quite like any apes you've seen before. Cheetah, hail and farewell.

The story line departs radically from Burroughs when Tarzan is "found" and returned to his grandfather at the Greystoke estate in Scotland (Jane is Grandpa Greystoke's American ward). And here the movie slows a bit, because Tarzan is shown in the conventional bind of the "natural" man constrained and embittered by civilization, psychologically torn by his two heritages. The literary Tarzan triumphs over civilization; the *Greystoke*

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Tarzan, at best, battles it to a draw. Nevertheless, this section is also done with sensibility, never descending to cheap comedy or bathos as it might so easily.

As noted above, *Greystoke* is done with intelligence *and* beauty — probably the chief glory of the film is the photography. Both the jungle and the Scottish estate are photographed with a glowing, pellucid quality, that of filtered afternoon light just after a rainstorm, unlike any film I can think of. There are a couple of landscape long shots that are stunners, a volcano in the distance and even an escarpment (what is a Tarzan movie without an escarpment?).

And then there's the acting. The cast as a whole is fine. Christopher Lambert is more than that as John Clayton (the name Tarzan is never once mentioned in the film), whose apelike behavior never becomes ludicrous, and whose look is perfect — in his jungle gear, with lank hair, headband, and loincloth, he is the image of the early Tarzan book illustrations, particularly the dust jacket of the first edition of the first book. The late, great actor, Sir Ralph Richardson, plays his last role as the grandfather; it could be thought that for one of his stature, a final role in a mere Tarzan movie would be a sad exit. In this case, it is a triumph, as is everything to do with *Greystoke*.

V2 BOMB

V: The Final Battle is not one of those major programming efforts in the genre that is going to enhance its image of maturity. If you remember, when last we saw the jolly cast of *V* a year ago, they were a group of LA humans who were the only people to realize that the benevolent aliens who had taken over the government and whose uniformed soldiers were omnipresent throughout the city (and presumably the country, though nothing is said about the rest of the U.S. — it's a very California-oriented show), were really nasty reptilian types disguised as TV actors. And they really wanted our resources and our bodies, not just for food but for (*gasp*) *other* things, as a pregnant human lady found out to her sorrow.

If you think about it, it's really our old friend, the '50s movie about the aliens who are out to GIT US, with echoes of the even older pulp magazine tradition of the nasty reptilian BEM carrying off the scientist's daughter, for reasons that no one has ever explained satisfactorily.

In this sequel, our beleaguered band battles on . . . and on . . . and on. It was spread over three nights, and I found it like plowing through an 800-page comic book. The aliens capture one of the rebels, and there's a battle — **ZAP**, CRASH! The aliens want to do naughty things with the waterworks — **ZAP**, CRASH! Over and over the plot circles with stupefyingly repetitious banality. And that's not to mention the terribly unlikely story ingredients (mammal human/saurian alien interbreeding being only the first). And the really awful acting.

By the time this sees print, *V* will be a weekly series. TV SF may never recover.

VIDEO . . . Some recent releases on video cassette of interest:

Krull (RCA Columbia) was the sleeper of summer before last, a lighthearted quest-fantasy with a good deal of imagination and gorgeous photography which turned some ordinary outdoor landscapes into a magic world, as well as studio constructions of singular originality. There is a fragile

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but gutsy Princess, a Prince who buckles swash with all the élan of Errol Flynn, and varied wizards and sorceresses who are a little different from the clichés that have already been established in film fantasy. Of particular note is a striking sequence toward the end of the film, when the Prince & Co. complete their quest mounted on the magic fire mares, who travel through the air on fire (*on* it; they are not ablaze). Highly recommended.

The Day After (ABC) can be had, if you want to repeat the cheerful experience of watching nuclear war's effect on Middle America. Valuable as the film's showing was, I can't imagine why anyone should want to see it again. For those who missed the broadcast, it should be viewed, however, if only to see what all the fuss is about. As pointed out endlessly on its initial showing, the account of survival during and after a nuclear war is probably mild compared to the hypothetical reality; but has its share of suspense. It *is* one of the current cassette best-sellers, curiously enough.

Siegfried (Blackhawk) is a rarity for the historically-minded, an early, silent-screen excursion into heroic fantasy made in Germany by the great director, Fritz Lang. Based, of course, on the Nibelung saga (though taking a slightly different tack than Wagner), it has dwarves, a dragon, and stunning decor that can only be described as neo-barbarian art deco. And there are some amazingly beautiful forest sequences in a totally created forest set. Not for those addicted to the contemporary comic-book school of film fantasy, it's a fascinating artifact if you have a certain amount of historical perspective. One of the joys of the VCR is that, through it, great rarities such as this film are again available.

Outland (Warner Bros.) somehow works better on the small screen than the large, perhaps because it's a claustrophobic thriller set in the artificial environment of a mining complex on Jupiter's moon, Io. No spectacle this; it all takes place in small, crowded spaces — dorms, bars, cramped apartments — and simply replays the plot of *High Noon*, thereby breaking one of the prime rules of written SF, which Silverberg discusses elsewhere in this issue. Nonetheless, it doesn't insult the intelligence, and does have a fine cast, headed by Sean Connery.

Note . . . Given the time it takes a magazine to get itself printed, this column will obviously not be a guide as to what to dash out and see at your nabe this evening (unless it's one of those smash hits that's around for months). For movies, it will act as an opinion with which to compare your own after the fact. Or as a hint as to something to watch for (or avoid) on television showing (which is happening closer and closer to theatrical releases) or release on video cassette, which these days can take just a month or so. For television shows, there are inevitably reruns within a few months. And we will try to keep up on the most interesting video releases as they happen — movies on cassette are now marketed and bought like books, and can be reviewed in the slightly more leisurely manner that books are, since they remain available indefinitely. ✂

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YOUNG DOCTOR ESZTERHAZY

by Avram Davidson

art: George Barr

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Some arcane, possibly occult force keeps persuading us that the title of this story should be as you see it, for all that the Doctor isn't one in it, at least not yet. The previously published adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy, some of which appeared in Fantastic *in the early 1970s, were collected into* The Enquiries of Doctor Eszterhazy *(Warner, 1975). The present story takes place perhaps a generation before the rest, and was written because your editor urged Avram to do it, a mere five years ago.*

The kingdom of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania is a 19th century descendant of what was once the Middle Roman Empire. If that raises the eyebrows of the historians among our readers, we must point out that Dr. Eszterhazy's world is different from our own in quite a few other ways, too.

Thou, eye-bitten, hag-ridden, elf-shotten, anse-rotten:
Under the wolf's paw, under the eagle's feather,
Under the eagle's claw, ever mayest thou wither.
— Anglish Spell
I, eye-clear, hag-dear, elf-sustained, anse-unblamed:
Over the wolf's paw, over the eagle's feather,
Over the eagle's claw, may I ever have good weather.
— Northish counter-spell
from *The book of the Troll-Hag (Trulldhaggibouger)*

It was the year that the bears were so bad in Bosnia.

The year that the bears were so bad in Bosnia and Queen Victoria actually said, "We are not amused," was a year very crucial in the affairs of Far-Northwestern Europe, as well as those of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania.

The always-tremulous Union of Scandia and Froreland was once again in a state of perturbation, the Frore Nationalists now insisting upon a separate Bureau of Weights and Measures, and the Scands (entirely as a matter of principle, having nothing to do with the imposts on stockfish and goat-cheese) resisting this under the well-known motto, **Where will it end?** That Froreland and Scandia constituted "Two Gloriously Free Monarchies Conjoined by One Single and Magnanimous Monarch" was a truth as well-known as it was troublesome. The monarch at this time was Magnus IV and III, "Staunchly Lutheran and Ever-Victorious King of the Scands, Sorbs, Goths, Lapps, Lipps, and Frores; Protector of the Skraelings, Terror of Iceland and Ireland, and Benefactor of the Butter Business" — known more generally as *Magni* — the reaction of the King

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to this most recent and non-negotiable demand, was to put down his glög-glass and offer to "settle the matter once and for all" by shooting dice for Froreland with the Khan-Tsar of Tsartary — Finnmark and Carelia to be the counter-stakes. This sporting suggestion was met with a most ringing silence all round about the Arctic Circle.

Hence, the train of cars departing from the Finnmark Station in St. Brigidsgarth at a most unusual hour: the Conjoint Cabinet of the Two Kingdoms had met in secret session and decided to send the Terror of Iceland and Ireland, Benefactor of the Butter Business, on an immediate and unofficial tour for the benefit of his health . . . Magnus being notoriously a martyr to bronchitis, liver-complaint, and elf-shot. . . . The incognito title selected was that of Count Calmar; the Royal preference for Great-Duke Götterdamurung being stiffly and decisively discouraged by Aide-de-Camp Baron Börg uk Börg.

As the journey was unofficial and had been almost unannounced (the *Court Circular*: The King has retired to the rural areas for a period of time), there was neither a military nor a civil sendoff: only two tiny groups; both on the wrong platform, with two banners: a new one, reading **Swearing Eternal Fealty to the House of Olaus-Olaus-Astridson-Katzenelenbögen-Ulf-and-Olaus, Froreland Demands a Separate Bureau of Weights and Measures**; and an old one, barely legible, representing the forlorn hope of **A Fourteenth Full-Bishop For Faithful Froreland** — this last was really getting very scuzzy and should have been replaced long ago — and would have, only it was "stained with the Blood of the Martyrs" — that is, of Adjutant-Bishop Gnump, always excessively prone to nosebleed. (He did indeed die, at the age of 87, during the royal absence, an advent marked by public mass recitations of the Shorter Catechism by all the as-yet-unconfirmed schoolchildren of the two kingdoms — even including the Unreconciled Zwinglians, by special dispensation of their Vicar-at-Large, who stipulated only that at the beginning of the famous and controversial Consubstantiation Clause they were to "pause perceptibly before continuing.")

For the first two days of the journey, "Count Calmar" had done nothing but drink champagne and play boston with his Aide-de-Camp; the third day he spent in bed (not in berth: in *bed*: even kings incognito do not travel without maximum basic comfort). Fairly early on the fourth day, the train drew to a slow, steamy halt at a station in what appeared to be a largely industrial suburb of a moderately large city; Magnus peered and blinked. "Is *this* Antibes?" he inquired, dubiously.

"No, Sire," said Baron Börg uk Börg. And cleared his throat.

"*Not* Antibes. . . . Cannes?"

"No, Sire. Not Cannes."

"*Not* Cannes. Oh! *Nice*! No . . . not Nice. . . ."

"*Not* Nice, Sire."

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Magnus considered this, slowly. Very, very slowly. Next he asked, "Then where?"

"Sire," said Baron Bŏrg uk Bŏrg, who had been awaiting this moment, entirely without enthusiasm, for a long, long time; "Sire: Bella."

"Oh," said Magnus. "Bella." He scraped his tongue against his front teeth. He examined the result. Then, with a sort of convulsion, he leapt to his carpet-slippered feet. "*Where?*" he cried.

"Sire. Bella."

The silence was broken only by the *tchoof-tchoog, tchoof-tchoog* of a very small shunting locomotive, about the size of a very large samovar, in the adjacent marshalling yard. On the platform the assistant station-master was yawning, buttoning his tunic, and eating his breakfast bread-and-goosegrease. A much younger man in a much smarter uniform came walking up quite rapidly. Someone in a frock-coat and a red, blue, and black sash stood by, blinking tiredly.

"*No* palm trees," muttered Magnus. Then, "For God's sake, Bŏrg, get me a glass of glŏg," he said. "And tell me where the devil we *are* . . . for a moment I thought you said 'Bella'!"

". . . Sire. . . ."

The Conjoint Cabinet had decided that Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania was quite a good idea. "Perhaps," suggested Royalforen-siccouncillor Gnomi Gnomisson; "Perhaps Magni can learn from a sovereign who rules three countries, how to manage, anyway, Jesus Christ, *two*." All the other ministers muttered, "Hear, hear!" and pounded firmly on the green table. (The Special Minister for Frorish Affairs had actually muttered, "Froreland demands a separate Bureau of Weights and Measures," but he pounded just as firmly as the rest.)

"May you be be-taken on an ice-floe by an impetuous polar bear!" cried Magnus; "At eight o'clock in the morning with a tongue like a stoker's glove! I cannot meet an emperor!"

". . . Sire. . . ."

"But why is he coming here incognito?" asked Ignats Louis (King-Emperor of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania). "He has never come here cognito; why is he coming here incognito?"

The Minister of Ceremonial Affairs had not become Minister of Ceremonial Affairs for nothing. "Because he is a Lutheran, Sire, and it is Lent," he said, as smoothly as though these facts had not just occurred to him. "Your Imperial Majesty could not officially receive a Lutheran during Lent."

"No, he couldn't, could he," observed Ignats Louis, who sometimes had trouble with pronouns. "Poor old chap's a Lutheran, isn't . . ." he

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paused a moment, swept on. "Well, well, so be it and be it so. *Lent*. Pontifical High Divine Liturgy this morning again, eh. Tell the Right Reverend Mitred Protopresbyter to keep the sermon short."

Then he put on his morning uniform saying slowly, "King of *where?*"

"But he is after all the King of Scandia and Froreland," said the Scandian and Frorish Ambassador. Again.

"Not according to my Official Intimations," said the Minister, slightly rustling the documents in his hand. "According to my official Intimations, he is, after all, a Count Calmar."

"Quite so, Highness; quite so. But, actually, he is, after all, the King of Scandia and Froreland. . . . You know. . . ."

"When the King of Scandia and Froreland actually and really visits my country as such, he will actually and really be received as such. *After all*. Willingly. Gladly. *When*, however, he comes as Count Calmar, he can be received only as Count Calmar. That is what an incognito is all *about*, my dear Thorbringsson, you know," said His Highness the Foreign Minister, in a lower and sympathetic and presumably less official tone of voice. "They should have thought of that in St. Brigidsgarth."

"Of course they should have," admitted the Ambassador; "however: they *didn't*. Meanwhile, Count Calmar *is* arriving in Bella, and — in, of course, the strictest confidence — I may tell you that Count Calmar *is* the King of Scandia and Froreland. *Is* he to be met at the station *only* by the Customs, the Immigration, and the Pest Control? I put the matter to you."

The matter so put to him, the Minister of Foreign Affairs agreed that it would not do. The matter so put to the Minister of Ceremonial Affairs, he also agreed that it would not do.

"But, Holy Saint Ulfilas! *Two* merry-andrew monarchs, *both* arriving this same morning, and *both* incognito! For my sin, for my sin, for my own most grievous sin!"

Foreign Affairs paused in his departure, looked at Ceremonial Affairs with slightly raised eyebrows. "Really! Oh you poor chaps! Well, but who is the other?" For total reply Ceremonial Affairs performed an expansive gesture, intended presumably to outline a very large (and very female) figure. Foreign Affairs threw up his hands, rolled his eyes. "For your sin," he said, dolefully, as he departed, "for your sin, for your own most grievous sin!"

It was rather a quiet moment in the Stand-by Equerries' Waiting Room. Some were slowly having breakfast off the buffet. Some sat reading the newspapers, either morning, or of the previous evening. Some sat sipping coffee. Some merely sat. The traditional loaf of large peasants' bread

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(stale, traditionally) had not been thrown at a single noisy junior. Enter: a page. "Summons for two," said he.

This was greeted with the equally traditional groan. Then someone asked, "What's the task?"

The page (without referring to his paper): "Dowager Margravine of the Ister, one. Count Magnus —"

The Equerries (with a real groan): "Her Fatness! *Ooohh!*"

"Margrave of the Ister" was one of the lesser titles of the King-Emperor, but not only was his mother long deceased, she had never even been Margrav*ine* of the Ister. But all knew who had been . . . long before the late and sincerely lamented Queen-Empress (Ignats Louis was a widower). . . .

An inattentive Equerry: "Why are the scrambled eggs so tough? Cook! To the galleys!"

An attentive Equerry: "Oh Christ, it's my turn. Will no one save me from this frightful fate?"

The Page: "Why 'frightful'? You go meet the Public Train at the West Station, you bob and do the 'Highborn and Noble Lady' lay and all the rest of that cow-puckey, she bobs back, one of her witches comes forward with the charity-pyx, you drop something in, you fall back, some nobly-born nun takes over and takes them away; you come back and sign in and recover your donation from the Clerk of the Privy Purse, you sign out and collect your one-half gold-piece and you've got the rest of the day off and can go get bonked at Miss Betty's —"

Cries of: "Boy! Presumptuous boy! To the galleys! Flog the boy!"

Another Equerry (holding out his hand): "Gimme Fat Emmy!" (Receives the paper summons and departs, accompanied by ribald hoots and howls.)

Yet Another Equerry: "I shall take the other task, Page. Give here."

This was a young man with a fresh and open face on which sat a light beard and moustache, plus, to be frank, a few freckles. Unlike the majority of equerries, who had on the dun undress jackets which would be changed for dress whites before leaving for duty, he was already wearing his dress white jacket: and on it were pinned the ribbons of a few campaigns. A palace saying had it, "To face a cannonade requires a brave heart and a steady hand; and so does drinking morning coffee in a dress white jacket." Another Equerry yet leaned over and looked at the official SUMMONS TO DUTY. "Who in the Hell, now, is Count Magnus Olaus of Calmar? — besides being a noble of the Kingdoms of Scandia and Froreland? Hey, Engli?"

Engli said that they would see, wouldn't they? His senior read on, " 'Arriving at the North Station,' at the North! Like a consignment of rendered lard! '— with two companions of rank and three servitors.' Hm, isn't that the country the polar bears come from? Mind you don't go back

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with them and freeze your boboes off . . . Bye. . . . Who's got the morning *Journal* with the new *román* in it?"

"I have, trade you for an Egyptian cig, I'm all out. Ta. Here you are. Funny chap, Engli, eh?"

"Funny, but nice. Oh, good: *From the French. Translated.* Mm. . . ."

The usual torpor regained rule over the Stand-by-Equerries' Waiting Room.

Emma Katterina hoisted up her skirts . . . not very far . . . and bobbed a curtsey . . . not a very deep curtsey . . . a station-master, even with a high silk hat, was, after all . . . a station-master. But he had bowed. So she had curtseyed. She repeated the motion, somewhat like all the tents of Kedar being pitched at once, when the Equerry bowed. And she repeated it a third time when the abbess of the Convent of the Purposefully Impoverished Ladies of Noble Rank Being Now the Wee Sisters of the Sacred Crown and Humble Servants of the Very, Very Poor — repeated it considerably more deeply — curtseyed to her. A certain amount of attention was paid her arrival on the Public Train (the public paid rock-bottom rates for a racking, creeping journey, but the public trains ran once a day in each direction over every inch of track belonging to the Royal-and-Imperial Ironroads, and no reservations were ever necessary); but, though more than one person in the station either bowed or curtseyed, her presence in the capital was so well known as not to attract very much attention; and she did not attend further to such further attentions as she did get. She next embraced the Lady-Abbess and to her, and to her small suite, said, "Let us briskly walk. The Mamma is, truth to tell, rather chilled."

By "The Mamma," she meant herself.

To the station-master and the Equerry she gave a very thin smile and a very sly glance out of the corners of her tiny eyes, as if to reassure them how she valued their formalities; then she swept out. The station, with its smells of crowds and steam and smoke, like a somewhat smaller and somewhat cheaper version of the Baths of Caracalla done in wrought-iron and smoky glass, was now permitted to resume its usual, and commercial, functions. The 18th century had made a brief appearance. Now the 19th had taken over, once again.

Having seen their baggage into the hydraulic elevator at the Grand Hotel Windsor-Lido (the Scandian Count was merely incognito, not slumming), the Equerry next saw them into the hotel's dining room. Magnus was feeling rather better. Bŏrg uk Bŏrg was stiff. Bŏrg uk Bŏrg was always stiff. And Kopperkupp, the private secretary, had spent so many years making himself inconspicuous that no one noticed he was

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there. "I assume that Count Calmar, on the *vin du pays* principle, is desirous of trying the national breakfast?" Count Calmar merely looked at him. He was rather young, rather tall, rather blond, and rather rough, in appearance. In reality, he was not really rough at all.

"What it is?" he asked. He spoke in English; he had indeed spent many years in the study of French; his marks, when reluctantly wrested from the Department of Educational and Ecclesiastical Affairs, proved to be a straight, undeviating, uninflected **D**. The Scandian Parliament, in an absolute fury, had deprived him of his traditional right to dispense the marriages of those under thirty who lacked parental consent; but the Frorish Parliament, on the principle that "French is a language spoken in brothels," refused to do any such thing.

"What is it? Well, there are really two national breakfasts. The first one is dark bread spread with goose-grease. The other is boiled blood-sausage with boiled potatoes. Eh?"

"Nay."

"Oh, but Count Calmar. The blood-sausage is so delightfully strong-smelling. The boiled potatoes are served cold and have such a delicately blueish tinge. As for the goose-grease —"

"Surely, Cornet Eszterhazy, you jest."

"Well, Count Calmar, yes I do."

Count Calmar guffawed. Then he groaned and put the palms of his hands over his eyes. Eszterhazy went on to say, "Seriously, I would recommend a new-laid egg, a cup of strong, clean coffee of the Mocha-Java blend . . . toasted light bread spread with pure sweet butter and Scottish marmalade . . . and . . . perhaps . . . with the coffee . . . a spoonful of white rum. Eh?"

Count Calmar said, "Aye."

Baron Börg uk Börg after a moment said, "The Count Calmar is desirous of informing himself of the social and political principles whereby your own country, Cornet Eszterhazy, is enabled to encompass so successfully, how shall I term it, populations non-homogenous in nature. This question naturally concerns us in our own Two Kingdoms." This statement so perfectly summed up, perhaps exactly, the desires of Count Calmar, that he said nothing whatsoever.

Cornet Eszterhazy said, "Hmm." After a while he added, "When we have finished breakfast, we might go for a ride. Or a walk."

Count Calmar said, "Aye!"

Cornet Eszterhazy next observed that one of his new-found friends' servants seemed rather odd . . . "For a servant, I mean. Nothing against his character, of course. He wears an odd sort of cap, and —"

"Ah, that is Ole," said Calmar, with an indulgent chuckle.

"His name is not really 'Ole,' only we call him so. I don't recall his real name," Börg said. "The cap is part of his national costume. He is a

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Skraeling, a man of some importance among his own people —"

"Sings songs," Calmar said, looking around rather wistfully . . . perhaps trying to find the social and political principles of his host-nation; perhaps for more white rum.

Eszterhazy, having but slightly breakfasted with the Equerries, had joined in eating the same items suggested for his guests. And drinking. He felt benign. Felt . . . also . . . interested. "A . . . a Skraeling?"

Bŏrg and Calmar nodded. Something faintly flickered nearby. Eszterhazy believed that Kopperkupp had also nodded. "Yes," Bŏrg said. "A people of unknown provenance, anciently if not aboriginally established in the northern parts of both our kingdoms; from having intermarried with the Scands and Frores they have lost much of a distinctive physiognomy while yet retaining some elements of their old traditions. Traditionally they are entitled to be represented at court; hence Ole being with us, ahem."

"He supplies the Sovereign with, at each meal, an egg of an Arctic tern," said Calmar.

Eszterhazy politely raised his brows; Bŏrg said, "Of course this is not possible except when the Sovereign bi-annually visits their territories. Elsewise it has been commuted to a duck's egg."

"I see. . . . What else *does* the man do, then?"

"He blacks the boots," said Bŏrg, somewhat curtly.

It was arranged that Bŏrg and Calmar (and, presumably, Kopperkupp) would make a very brief call at their Embassy — "To be sure," the Frorish Nationalists said, "we must have our own Embassies some day. But first we must have our own Bureau of Weights and Measures!" — that Bŏrg and Kopperkupp would remain for whatever business need be. And that Calmar would then/there meet the Equerry-Cornet. And that they two would go off. Somewhere. Somewhere (it was discreetly understood) respectable.

The political education . . . perhaps re-education . . . of "Count Calmar" need not begin that very day. Perhaps the very next.

As the Northern visitors wished first to make some slight adjustments to their dress — a change of dress-coats, perhaps, the ribbons of an order — Eszterhazy would wait below, and meet them in the grand lobby. He watched them as they departed; watched the waiter arriving with more coffee; watched as a tall, thin man in tweeds arose from a nearby table and trotted — there was no other word — trotted over to Eszterhazy's table and snatched up one of the egg-cups and held it close to his eye. "Extraordinary," he said. "Extraordinary." Then, suddenly aware that his conduct might just possibly be considered other than entirely ordinary, he turned to Eszterhazy and begged his pardon. This was granted.

"Sir," the man said. "I am Regius Professor of Natural History at the University of Oxbridge. *Who* would have expected to find this on a table

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of an hotel in the capital of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania!"

"But why so, Professor?" asked Eszterhazy, slightly put-out, and slightly amused. "We do not live on locusts here. I myself, generally speaking, eat an egg a day. At least one egg."

The Regius Professor of Natural History at the University of Oxbridge turned to him a face displaying the utmost astonishment. "But surely not the egg of an Arctic tern?" he asked.

Börg was not eager to relinquish Magnus, but was obliged to agree that the younger man did indeed require to stretch his legs and breathe fresh air after more than three days in a railroad carriage. Still, he did ask where . . . "generally speaking" . . . they planned on going. Eszterhazy acknowledged that this was a very fair question. He stroked his fair and as yet rather sparse moustache. "I had thought," he said, "that we might commence with the Imperial Institute of Political and Social Economy."

"Yes, yes!" — Börg.

"After a perhaps not over-tiring visit, hmm, next perhaps the Royal Ethnical and Ethical Museum. . . ."

"Excellent!" — Börg.

"After that . . . well, although, alas, the Diet is not in session, still, a visit to the gallery will display the exquisite nicety with which the national and linguistic and political affiliations are delineated by means of a system of color-codes unique in Europe; the seats being upholstered — for example — in off-white for the Scythian Conservatives all the way through beige — for the Hyperborean Monarchial Democrats —"

"Very good, very good!" — Börg.

"There was some rumpus once upon a time, with the Slovatchko Christian Socialists and the Pan-Imperial Unified Socialists each demanding red; however, this could not be granted, red being the traditional color of the Pannonian Ultra-Conservative Agrarians; and in the end, the Slovatchko Christian Socialists accepted puce and the P-I. U. Socialists, mauve. Perhaps this might interest Count Calmar?"

"Cornet, it cannot fail to do so." — Börg. (Grimly)

Magnus, later, had fallen into a sullen silence, but by and by he began to look about with some interest at the passing scene and its presumably polyglot peoples. Just then the young Cornet lifted his light malacca walking-stick and gestured towards a stolid granite building across the street. "Imperial Institute of Political and Social Economy." Magnus's face fell at once, but his guide went on, brisky, "Well, so much for the Imperial Institute of Political and Social Economy; we have commenced with it. Now at the end of this alley, which leads towards the river, there is a place of public pleasure officially licensed under the name of **The Pint of Port**, the quantity which is sold there for three-tenths of a skilling . . . officially . . . actually the drink consists of the washings of

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expressed grape-hulls mixed with a small amount of low-grade potato-spirit, in consequence of which the place is commonly cailed **The Pint of Piss**. Its accommodations are rude, its ambience is coarse, its customers are very often totally depraved, and —"

"Take me there at once, *do you hear?*" said Count Calmar.

It was perhaps an hour and a half later that, as they strolled on through the Sunken Square (Ignats-Salvador had intended a palace but died just as the excavation was completed), a large old woman performed a full-formal curtsey of archaic manner as she came upon them; and Magnus, automatically, gave her a full-formal bow. He had taken a number of steps before he gave a start, started to turn around, caught his new friend's amused eye, and asked, "Who was *that?*"

Down deep in a dungeon . . . that is, down deep in what had long ago *been* a dungeon for the confinement of forgers of the petty currency (and served them right) but was now a cellar for the storage of merely moderately harsh wine — the sort which corner grocers fix up with sugar syrup and advertise as **From Our Own Vineyard in the Country** . . . a device which fools no one but indicates that the stuff is not *too* bad: the worst poison almost invariably being labeled as **Imported From Oporto in the Land of the Portagews, DELICIOUS!** . . . three men sat at a bench before a table spread with machinery. Presently, "The works is almost ready," said one of the men. He wiped his brow with the sleeve of the denim jacket he wore.

"And then," said another . . . pausing, as if he relished the words . . . "and then: Ka-BOOM!"

"Death to the tyrant!" cried a third. They returned to their employment.

After but a moment, one of them said, "One hears . . . One hears rumors . . . one hears rumors that the tyrant may already *be* dead —"

"Nonsense!"

"Lies, spread by the tyrant's toadies!"

"The works! Let us get on with the works, and not dawdle over granny-talk!"

For a while they toiled on, jewelers' loupes in their eyes, so cautiously weighing gunpowder, so carefully adjusting clock-work, so deftly fastening wires, turning tiny screws — "But why, if the tyrant is not dead, has he not been seen riding his Whitey horse as always? One hears that, for days now, he has not been —"

"Enough, babbler! The works!"

The room was large and dark; only where they worked was there light. Somewhere, neither near nor far, water dripped. Another man spoke. Diffidently. "It is of course essential that the tyrant be destroyed. But he

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is not trustworthy. Suppose that just at the time the works go off, just at the door of the Infants' Infirmary in the Hospital for Children of Palace Servants, the tyrant is up in the throne room, trying on crowns — and not bringing sweets to the invalid infants?"

There was a murmur. There was a voice saying firmly, " 'Suppose?' suppose. We shall suppose he will be there."

Gaslight hissed.

Now in lower voice the same one resumed the same theme. "It is a terrible thought that the children would have died in vain. . . ."

Once more the firm voice. "That would be the tyrant's fault. If he had no servants they would have no children. It is the enemy who determines the conditions of the war."

They all nodded, bowed their heads, worked on. There were no further interruptions.

In a room in a tower not more than a kilometer away, three other men glanced up from their map and looked out the window. One of them gestured with his pointer. "The vehicle in question will at the time appointed cross over the Italian Bridge disguised as a fruit-and-vegetable wagon. They expect to enter the Royal and Imperial Palace grounds without trouble via the back central passageway, and to stop just at the door of the Infants' Infirmary in the Hospital for Children of Palace Servants. There several crates of produce will be unloaded in order to add an air of verisimilitude to the scene. Then, one by one, the men are going to leave the scene. The brakes and wheels will have already been tampered with so the vehicle cannot easily be moved. At three o'clock, as usual, the King-Emperor enters the Hospital to visit for fifteen minutes, said visit includes the Infirmary, and the infernal machine is to be set to go off at a quarter after three." He gestured towards a clock.

The men were all in uniform; but it was a curious sort of uniform, entirely bare of any adornments whatsoever. One of the men asked, "How accurate is the report?"

"Our secret agent assures us that it is quite accurate."

There was such silence as was not dispelled by the sounds of the great capital city below, muted by distance into one continual murmur, like that of some far-off and unbroken surf. Then someone said, "This is a terrible vision."

Someone else slightly shrugged, said, "All the visions of the Jacobins are terrible. That is why they must all be destroyed, they and their visions together, whatever names they employ: democrats, socialists, republicans, reformers, anarchists, conservatives — as though the present system were worth conserving! It is re-action which alone may save us all. A reaction which will totally sweep away such diabolisms as representative government, religious toleration, and all the rest of it. Mud! *Mud!* Every

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change which has come about since 1789 has come up from the mud, and back down into the mud it must go."

Someone cleared his throat. "You are quite sure then, companion, that it is not our duty to inform the August House?"

"Certainly not! The Jacobins must be destroyed and it is by exactly such an action on their part that shall come about a reaction, a revulsion which shall destroy them. All of them! They shall all die! Let the mobs arise and do this; then we shall destroy the mobs!"

The view from the tower window encompassed all the nearby Gothic Lowlands; one of those present said: "I see the Gothic Lowlands in flames . . . then all Scythia . . . Pannonia, too: then Transbalkania —"

"Scholars say," another murmured, "that it was the Gaetae of Dacia who were the ancestors of the modern Scythian Goths and thus neither the Visigoths nor Ostrogoths; but scholars also say the descent is from the Gauts of South Scandia . . . and do not scholars also connect the Getae of Ovid's lines, *Haec mihi Cimmerio bis tertio ducitur aestas Litore pellitos inter agenda Getas* with those Geats which the Beowulf informs were centuries before encountered on the North and Baltic Seas? Scholars *do*."

"Damn all scholars! Let the scholars burn, too!"

A throat was cleared. "The Emperor is not a scholar . . . what of the Emperor?"

The reply was brief. "The Emperor is a saint and has a place prepared for him in Heaven. Let the war go on."

"But —"

"It is the enemy who determines the conditions of the war. Let the war go on."

"Who was *that?*" asked Magnus.

The young Cornet-Equerry smiled. "*That?* That is Emma Katterina."

"Who?"

Emma Katterina. Her mother may have been "the barmaid of Bratislava," for that matter the mother of Don John of Austria had been "the laundress of Regensburg": unlike Don John, whose father was Holy Roman Emperor, Emma Katterina's father was merely a backwood noble in a barely united severalty of backwood thrones — again, however, and unlike Don John: she was of legitimate birth.

The Sunken Square, as Magnus quickly glanced, had the appearance of a valley of sorts down the middle of which rushed a river in spate, only breaking its flood to divide and roll round a black crag. Looked at more slowly, the river was revealed to be the usual throng and the rock to be moving against it as it parted: vast and unmistakable was the immense figure of Emma Katterina, Dowager Margravine of the Ister, Dowager Great Duchess of Dubrovnik, and Titular Queen of Carinthia . . . a.k.a.

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Tantushka, Mammushka, Fat Emmy, Her Fatness, and Great Katinka: from head to toe in fusty black slowly growing green for years, and accompanied by what was for her a train of state: "three witches and a priest," as they were popularly described. She was also the widow of the half-brother of Ignats Louis, King-Emperor of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania, as the Triune Monarchy was now called. Her parsimony was notorious; even now she was walking all the way across Bella in order to avoid the two *copperka* fares on the tram. Earlier, later, other sovereigns might negate this or that with some such phrase as **It is not Our pleasure** or **La Reyne non veult;** Emma Katterina accomplished it with the words, "Mamma wouldn't let." Metternich himself had shrugged his defeat by her, Francis Joseph would greet mention of her name by slowly rolling his head from side to side and uttering pained little moans. Bismarck —

Emma Katterina was not only immensely tall, immensely fat, immensely charitable (which was where her pensions mostly went); she was also immensely ignorant. She had certainly never heard of Darwin or Pasteur. It is doubtful if she could have placed Scandia, let alone Froreland, on a map; but, face to face with their Conjoint King, she had recognized his face at once. She had curtseyed. The effect was somewhat as though the Alps had curtseyed. Magnus bowed. Emma Katterina passed on by. Her moles bristled and her chins flowed. Then she crossed herself. Then she spat. Three times. A king was a king.

And a heretic was a heretic.

She knew her duty.

"Who was *that?*" asked Magnus again.

"Who was *that?*" someone else, far across the Sunken Square, asked his companion. " 'Tantushka'? Tell us something new. No: who was that she bobbed to? *No.* Fool. Does she bob to everyone? *Find out who she bowed to.*"

"Why was The Mamma pleased to bob and spit just now back there a bit?" asked one of the "witches," surtitled the Baroness Bix and Bix.

"The Mamma saw that that there youngling was a far-off king; The Mamma knows the faces of all the kings in Christendom," nodding firmly as she strode along, said Emma Katterina; "and emperors, too, even Of Abyssinia, who is in Asia, and Of Brazil, which he is in Africa. *Oh* yes!"

"*Oh* yes!" echoed the second "witch," surtitled the Countess Critz. "The Mamma she cuts them kings's faces out of the penny papers and pastes them up in the excuse me."

"And what far-off king the youngling was?" asked the third "witch," surtitled the Highlady Grulzakk.

Emma Katterina shrugged. "The King of Koppenholm, something-

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like," she said. "The Mamma spit, after-like, what because, because he's a Calvinist: to burn," and here she spat again . . . without malice. "Nicelooking boyling, yes."

"In Koppenholm," the Chaplain said, screwing up his scrannel jaws, and unscrewing them down again, "the people there, may the canker eat, are said to be, allegedly, Lutherans, some say." The Chaplain may have been a bigot, but he was a tactful one.

"Lutherans are the worst kind of Calvinists," said Emma Katterina, nothing fazed. "Doctor Calvin was a doctor, in Paris-France," she explained to her suite. "And he turned heretic, for what because? Because for what he wouldn't buy a bishop's dispensation to marry his first cousin's nephew's niece. The Queen of Navarre, of blessed memory, she argues with him till she could see green worms with little red heads; but no and no and no! 'For Heaven's sake, Dr. Calvin,' says she, 'buy the bishop's dispensation, what does it cost, a richman like you?' But no and no and *no*! 'I'll not have no dispensation,' says he, 'though the heavens may fall, and what's more,' says he, 'I'll not have no bishops, neither!' "

Gasps of horror and disgust greeted this revelation of total depravity. "So the Queen of Navarre, of blessed memory, who was minding the schloss while her brother was off a-fighting the King of Ireland, she condemns him of course to be burnt at the stake for Unitarianism without benefit of strangulation. So off *he* runs, with his codpiece a-flapping atween his knees, not stopping till he gets to Gascony, where he changes his name to Doctor Luther, but the Elector a-sends him a packing. Nextwise he settles down in Switzerland, where their brains be all addled from the snows; Zwingling, he calls himself then. 'Away with all bishops!' says he. And there hasn't been no bishops in Switzerland from that day to this, which is the reason them Switzers has to come down into France or Lichtenstein for to receive Confirmation. Come here incognito, it seems, this boy-chick, which it means, without no uniform, so that republicans and other anarchists won't fling dirt in his face; what it means to be a king these days.

"Or a queen," she added. And slowly shook her massive head.

Somewhere under its roof-slates the Grand Hotel Windsor-Lido maintained a dormitory and a row of cubicles for the housing of its employees and the servants of its guests; "Ole Skraelandi" did not bother to see where he was to be quartered according to the G.H.W.-L.; he knew his place and his place never varied: whether it was the turf beneath a reindeer-hide tent or the thick Belgian carpet of an elegant hotel, he slept across the threshold of his sovereign's chamber. Somewhere far away amidst the moors and marshes of Skraeland, so void of landmarks to the outside eye, was a small hollow amidst a grove of dwarf willows. Here the

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child was born to whom the shaman gave the name of Eeiiuullaalaa. No one could have expected the pastor of the State Church, charged *ex officio* with the registration of births in his vast parish — he lived 100 kilometers from that willow-girt hollow — no one could have expected him to have spelled *Eeiiuullaalaa* correctly and so perhaps he hadn't; the Skraelings, being largely illiterate, would not have known the difference. *Largely* is, however, not *entirely*. The shaman knew how to spell it and he had spelled it — once — in runes carved onto a piece of reindeer horn, which he had entrusted to the infant's parents, strictly cautioning them not to show it about lest someone use it to work a spell upon the babe. The shaman had been the infant's uncle or great-uncle, and in celebration of the event he had gotten drunk on Hoffman's Drops (if "drunk" was quite the word to describe the effects of that antique but still potable and still potent mixture of brandy and ether, of which it was said that, "Three drops will paralyze a reindeer, four will kill a bull-elch, five would stun a polar-bear, six would bring a musk-ochs to its knees, and seven make the troll-hag smile"); so perhaps he had not spelled it correctly, either.

The boy did not grow tall, for the Skraeling are not a tall-growing people; but he grew, and, growing, learned deer-craft from his parents, and from his old uncle or great-uncle learned leech-craft and elf-craft and troll-craft; other things he learned, too, even the general names for which the Skraeling do not tell to others. And when a time came, and it did not come often, to select a shaman to go and live with the King and protect the King from harm (the incumbent shaman knowing he was now of an age to die), the young man suddenly and successively had visions and dreams of such a potent and indicative nature that every shaman in Skraeland agreed it was this one who must go. At the Court he took care of the sacred egg, of preparing charms for going under the threshold or under the bed, of beating the *toom-toom* if necessary and of blowing the eagle-whistle if necessary (these last two had not been necessary), and of chanting protective chants. And as indication of the trust the Court of the Scands and Frores had in the Skraels, they allowed him full charge of the care of the Sovereign's boots, shoes, and slippers: a *most* important magic! Each night as he rubbed off the dust or scraped the dirt or mud from the royal footgear, and by observing where the King had been, was able to decide where the King should be: *Bear him well, well, bear him well, well, well,* he would murmur, as he rubbed into the footgear of the King of Scandia and Froreland the tinted, scented grease they had provided him. Once, in the time of the previous king, John XII and XI, he, "Ole Frori," as they called him casually at Court, had observed on the twice-royal buskins, traces of a marl which could have come only from the estate of a certain high-born (and beautiful) lady known (though not to John XII and XI) to be a double-agent in the pay of both the Russians and the Prussians. Such elf-craft he performed upon every single item which the King ever wore

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upon his feet that the King went not thither ever again. Nor knew why not.

It was all quite different from the prolonged twilights, the sky-capped plains of golden moss over which the antlered herds drifted like dark clouds, the night-welkin covered with the quivering mantle of the boreal witch-lights; but the ancestors had told him in dreams both dark and clear that he must serve the King: and serve he did, although scarcely the King knew that he was being served — and how he was being served, and how well, the King did not know at all.

And certainly the King did not know, as he idly sought his casual pleasure in this strange city, that the least of his servants sought the King, tirelessly shadowing him from street to street, concealment easy in this forest of buildings to one who had concealed himself in and on the unforested moors of Skraeland.

"But would republicans and other anarchists come here to Bella for to hurt the youngling king?" one of the "witches" asked.

"The Mamma wouldn't let," said Emma Katterina, firmly. Then — "That big dump there, is for us, not?"

"*Royal and Imperial Bureau of Parks, Forests, and Lands*, ah-hah," said the Chaplain. Marble and granite and an entire range of mansarded turrets; they turned towards it.

The Mamma's lips moved; she had no need of notebooks. "In Ritchli, eleven paddocks, grazing rights, commuted: cash. In Georgiou, firewood rights, gathering of, commuted: cash. In Apollograd, that's in Hyperborea, twelve fields for geese and goats, which they made a park of, ah how the Pappa, now in Paradise, enjoyed for breakfast the goose-grease therefrom: the fees therefor, commuted: cash. Three deer-parks in Pannonia and a Hunt-the-Hare there also, commuted: cash. All due this quarter fortnight past, uccage, soccage, copy-hold, frankpledge, assigned Turkish Tributes, mum-mum-, *what?* One hundred and thirty-five ducats, eleven skilling, thirteen pennies, one half-penny — *plus interest* — from the big dump, here." She ignored the vast front steps and headed for a side door at street level.

Inside, one clerk-bookkeeper looking up through the glass half of his office door groaned, "Oh God, here she comes!"

"Her Fatness! What! Have you computed her interest? *Do it at once!*"

"Too late, too late — besides, she will do it herself anyway — Rise! All rise! Your Titular Majesty! Humbly welcoming, and kissing the hands and feet!"

The Titular Queen of Carinthia (Big Mamma, etc., etc.) paid no attention. To her suite she said, sinking with some relief into an immense and heavy chair kept there for just that purpose, "This quarter, the pensions from this big dump for the lepers are going, to pay for supplying

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loaves, they shouldn't their bleeding gums to bruise upon the hard and stale — *Writer!*" this to the clerk-bookkeeper, "The abacus!" There were at that time in the secluded Hospital of Saint Lazarus, less than one hundred patients; most people in the Triune Monarchy (". . . fourth-largest Empire in Europe . . .") scarcely knew there were any, anymore: but the Titular Queen of Carinthia knew every one of them by name, and with each click of the abacus-beads, she baked for them a loaf of bread.

Not feudal dues alone had been commuted; galley-slavery in punishment for crime had been commuted: into forced labor at the Royal and Imperial Shipyards (a courtesy plural, there was only one). Indeed, the term "ships' carpenter" had so much come to mean a convict, that genuine ships' carpenters termed themselves "maritime woodworkers." There was indeed talk, emanating no doubt from such sophisticated sources as Vienna, Berlin, Paris, and the American city of Philadelphiapennsylwania; talk that such forced labor was terribly old-fashioned, and that those convicted of offenses against society should be held in special institutions where they might learn to be *penitent,* and thus, to *reform.* But for the present, such advanced ideas had yet to penetrate into the legal system of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania; and burglars and forgers and manslayers not hanged continued to haul and hew and saw and scrape and caulk and paint: and if they declined to do, they were flogged until they ceased to decline. Bruto Alarits had declined . . . for a while . . . but not for a very long while.

It had been two years since he had finished his sentence. For a while he had found employ as a maritime woodworker in a private yard, but his employers had been finicky, objecting to the disappearance of tools and nails, and that had been that. Bruto was by then rather too mature to enter an apprenticeship in the pickpocket line and so had alternated casual labor with casual theft — smash and grab, grab and run — the lot. He was clever enough not to be caught again, but . . . perhaps he was not so clever as he thought . . . not enough to be prosperous. Finally he had drifted into a sort of padroneship over lesser, weaker, more stupid thugs, enforcing a sort of organization and system, maintaining a sort of terror over those who did not appreciate the advantages of the system but perforce went along with it. Sometimes he strolled through factory and warehouse districts, accompanied often by his second-in-command, one Pishto-the-Avar, eye cocked for stealables. He would not himself steal; he would assign others. He would find a fence. He would exact commissions. Sometimes he would lounge around the streets.

Sometimes he lounged around the Sunken Square.

To call Pie-Petro's place "a low dive" was to be not judgemental but exact. The place was not only low in a social sense, it was low in a

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topographical sense as well, having originally been built at the bottom of a ravine and the ravine largely filled in and another storey built onto the original building . . . but the entrance remained where it had first been, and down the several pairs of stairs Bruto now walked in a thoughtful manner. Inside the dive it was dim — what else — and the sole gas-lamp emitted as much smell as light. Petro, sallow, squat, silent, had discovered a trick of business from which he had never seen any reason to depart: when you came into his joint, you had to buy a pie. You could also, if you wished, (and most wished) take your choice of bad beer, bad wine, bad brandy, bad vodka, bad rum — whiskey or gin was not available — the pie was not so bad — not so bad as the other items, anyway. You had your choice of meat or fruit — though not what kind of meat or what kind of fruit. The pies were small and so, for that matter, were the drinks, but as most of Petro's customers were apt to be greeted elsewhere with the words, "Outside, you," few of them ever complained. Petro was believed to have done rather well, and to own the leaseholds on several tenement-courts.

In his usual corner a man in an extraordinarily-ripped frock coat was staring into a wine-cup as though engaged in divination. Bruto's gesture brought wine pouring into the cup, and after the level had gone down again, Bruto spoke.

"Professor. A, like, question."

"Question me," the professor said, after a moment.

"On, like, etiquette." A subject less likely to invite questions in Pie-Petro's, it would have been hard to find. "Supposing there's, like, a queen. And she bobs. Who'd she bob to? Huh?"

Slightly readjusting his torn coat, the professor said it would depend. "Could be to anybody. The Patriarch. The Emperor. Depends. A queen could curtsey even to a muck-raker, if he'd just saved her tiny grandson from tumbling off a dock. . . ." The level of the wine went down again, a bit more was added to raise it, not much. "How deep does this queen bob?"

Bruto looked all around the low dive and there was that in his look which made all shun his glance. He then, and most solemnly, performed a curtsey before the professor's bloodshot eyes.

"That deep, eh?"

"Yeah."

"Only to a fellow-sovereign. Why —?"

A clumping of boots down the long steps; in came Pishto-the-Avar, drew Bruto slightly aside. "I shadowed'm, Boss. To the Windsor-Lido — '*King*'? There ain't no kings there. There's a couple counts there, though; they're travellin on Scando-Frorish passports, whatever the Hell *they* are. Huh? Boss?"

But, prior to answering, Boss posed a further question of his own.

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"Hey, Professor, what's it mean if a king is travelling like a count, like?"

The professor gazed once again into his goblet; divined it was empty; was obliged to look up. His face ceased to be vacant, entirely; a look of faint thought came over it. "It means he is travelling incognito, *incognito*, literally *unknown*, you know. . . ." His title derived from his having been for a while, long ago, a tutor to the junior page-boys at the Palace; he knew, then, presumably, whereof he spoke. "As, for instance, a sovereign wishes to visit a foreign country, but not in official state. Could be inconvenient both to him or her and to the host nation; therefore he or she employs what is termed a lesser title, as for example the late King of Illyria visited here as Count Hreb, and. . . ." The professor's voice, in its alcoholic monotone, had gotten lower and lower and slower and slower. It next ceased. Then with a look of, almost, terror, on his filthy face, the professor lurched to his trembly feet and took a tottering step towards the door. He was, to employ a polite term, distrained.

Afterwards, the professor having been made comatose with wine, a further conversation:

"Kidnap a king and hold him for ransom. Why, it's never been *done*!"

"Sure it has! Didn't them French capture the old King of Scythia and hold him for ransom, back in them Bonaparte days?"

"Yeah . . . but the French had a army. We ain't got the place, we ain't got the —"

"We ain't got the strennth."

"We ain't got the strennth. Fact. — *Still* . . ."

They gazed at each other, eyes gleaming; mouths open, silent.

"This could mean we swing."

"Yeah . . ." Silence.

"This could mean buckets o' ducats."

"*Yeah*. . . ."

Then —

"Only one man could do it. On-ly *one*."

"Yeah . . . uh, who'd ya mean?"

A hissed-in breath. "Who'd I mean? I mean the Boustremóvitch. Who I mean."

"The Boustremóvitch! Yeah. . . . *Yeah. Yeah!*. . . ."

The two young men continued their stroll. Bella was certainly not Paris, but it was equally certainly larger than St. Brigidsgarth. And far more cosmopolitan. Here one saw men and women whose cut and style reminded one, at least, of Paris — or, at any rate, Brussels. And here were yeoman farmers in the boots and baggy britches of the Gothic Highlands, there a pair of Lowland Hussars in black shakoes, a group of drovers in the characteristic embroidered vests of Poposhki-Georgiou, Mountain Tsigane women in gaudy flounces, River Tartars wearing caftans of many

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colors, barge-sailors with rings in dirty ears, Avars in low-crowned hats with narrow brims and embroidered bands . . .

"— and," Count Calmar enquired, "besides your duties as equerry, of course, what do you do?"

The young cornet chuckled. " 'Do'? Why should I '*do*' anything? Well, well, you must excuse my levity. My estates are not vast, but at least they are not entailed. I am such a younger son of such a younger son of a cadet branch that what lands came to me were not thought worth tying up; I may sell them if I wish, but there is no hurry. What would I do with the money? Wastrel it away in France? I think not. But . . . why . . . when I am not on duty for the Palace? Well, I hunt a little, I fish a little; very few people of our class do fish here, but I picked it up in England. I have an uncle with an English wife and have spent many summers there; God save us from the winters!"

Magnus said, a touch of reproof, a touch of gloom, in his voice, "The winters of England are tropical in comparison to our Far-Northwestern winters. We have snow instead of rain. And so. And also —?"

Also Cornet Eszterhazy played cards and billiards. He had a horse — sometimes two. He visited the music halls and, and in season, the opera. Now and then he visited the ladies. No, there was no one lady. "I'm afraid it sounds like a rather useless life."

Magnus said it sounded like a rather delightful life. "Everywhere I go at home some minister or chancellor is thrusting papers at me; och! God! Those eternal papers! And not just one set of them. Two! One for each kingdom. Oh why did my thrice-removed grandfather marry my thrice-removed grandmother! 'To unite adjacent kingdoms,' you will say. 'And the House of Olaus-Olaus-Astridson with that of Katzenelenbögen-Ulf-and-Olaus.' Well, the Houses are united. But the kingdoms, not. Always, from the Frores, some new demand. Always. Always. The Scands bother me quite enough, 'Sire, you must not so often get drunk' — why not? If I am sober for the ceremonies, what difference, the rest of the time? 'Sire, you must put on a different uniform,' 'Sire, you must attend for this occasion, for that, you must get up,' 'Sire, you must not do that, Sire, you must do this, Sire, you cannot eat with people of a lower class, Sire' — och! God! So stiff, the Scands! The Scands, so stuffy!" He stopped and shook his head so rapidly that his English-style cap almost fell off; he adjusted it so that it rested more securely on his long, blond hair.

"But the Frores! The Frores! Look: an easier way of collecting taxes: the Frores don't want it. A better method of arranging the Army, the Navy: the Frores don't want it. Such a simple method of satisfying the demands for free education: the Frores are not satisfied at all. Always dour, always scowly, always standoffish; the Börg uk Börg said a good word once: said, 'The Frores always fight to drift upstream.' Now, why, my dear new friend? *Why*?"

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His dear new friend stroked a moustache like corn-silk — was thoughtful indeed.

"*Why*?"

"Well . . . Count Calmar . . . it has been my experience that . . . no people, really, wants to be governed by another people, whether it is governed ill or governed well."

Magnus muttered that the Frores really did not want to be governed at all. Then the mutter died away. Then he half-turned. "You spoke of visiting the ladies. Where . . . may one ask . . . as a visitor . . . are the ladies whom one may visit? *Not* one of those 'nice, quiet places, like a boarding-house for parsons' widows. I have in my mind Turkish Gypsy girls with wild, black manes, and for a music there would be drums and concertinas and timbrels, and a wine as red as ox-blood. . . . Eh?"

The Slovatchkoes, third-most numerous (after the Goths and Avars) of the peoples of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania, were divided in their opinion of the Brigand Boustremóvitch. Some still admired their old image of him. Some no longer did so. Some had never admired him at all. Their patriotic painter, Karpustanko, had depicted him with large and lustrous eyes, a heroic stance, and vast curly mustachioes worthy of a bashi-bazouk, but time had taken toll. The large eyes were now less lustrous than bloodshot, the stance had declined into bowed legs and a dropped chest, and the mustachioes were limp and greyed. Furthermore, he who had once had his nest in a cave whence he preyed upon Turks and Tartars — and, incidentally, upon anyone else who passed by and had not purchased protection — now dwelt in a decayed once-palace in a near-slum section of Bella, and had done so ever since giving his parole and obtaining, with Imperial reluctancy, the Imperial pardon. Did he pass his days reading *Boethius The Consolations of Philosophy*? No he did not; he had never heard of Boethius, and, save for a faltering and seldom exercised acquaintance with the big red rubrics in the mass-book, the Brigand Boustremóvitch could not read. The Secret Police (uniform: regulation sky-blue trousers, with a crimson tunic) spasmodically reminded the Ministry of Justice that "the reformed Brigand, Boustremóvitch," had a finger (seven or eight fingers) in criminal conspiracies of several sorts, kindly see attached document. The Ministry of Justice eventually invariably instructed the Secret Police to "continue its most valuable reports, Faithfully theirs, [squiggle]." Translation: "We would rather have him in Bella collecting an illegal tax on radish-wagons (for example), than back in the Glagolitic Alps mounting mounted irregulars. Again." Gradually the Secret Police had grown bored. And so had the Brigand Boustremóvitch. Often he had thought, wistfully, of breaking his parole and absquatulating for, say, Bulgaria, whence he would harry the Greeks. *Or* the Turks.

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But the years like great black oxen trod the earth, and he had done nothing.

Ignats Louis —

Ignats Louis, groaning softly from a very recently returned pain to which he had long, at irregular intervals, been a martyr, stood studying an immense sheet of parchment on a table before him. Enter his Prime Minister.

"Your Royal and Imperial Majesty may perhaps wish to ride the Whitey horse this afternoon."

"No he doesn't perhaps either. Oh God, I am being punished for my sins!"

"But the people will expect it, your —"

"The people must bear the disappointment, oh Holy Souls in Purga——"

"But I have taken the liberty of having him saddled, Your —"

"Then take the liberty of riding him yourself. Oh. *Oh.* OH!"

"My consitutional advice —"

"*Stuff* your constitutional advice! I shan't leave the premises — except of course to visit the dear little kiddies in the 'spital-house as usual —"

The First Minister still lingering and seeming about to press further, the Presence, bifurcated beard bristling with rage, addressed to him the following words, of perhaps dubious constitutional aspect: "*Out*, you jumped-up burgomaster! You hangman morphadite and whoreson hostler: OUT!"

The First Minister, thinking enviously of Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli, bowed deeply and abjectly, and got OUT. Ignats Louis, with a groan and a whimper, returned his attention to the chart on the table. Gradually his moans ceased. Attention to his family tree never failed to soothe him. His finger fondly traced the Lineage in all its ramification, including those marked (MORGANATIC), (ILLEGITIMATE), (NON COMPOS MENTIS), and — none the less Royal, none the less Imperial — (INSANE). So.

Maurits Louis m *Matilda Gertrude.* So. *Ignats Salvador* m *Amelia Carolina.* Quite correct. So he had. *Salvador Ignats. Theresa Matilda.* Hmm. Well, he had not exactly *married* her, Salvador Ignats, but he certainly would have if he had not already had two living wives in the dungeons; a stickler for the canon law if there ever was one, Salvador Ignats.

All these monarchs had had their little idiosyncrasies, God bless them. Maurits Louis changed his uniform four or five times a day, but could never be persuaded to change his underwear at all; Ignats Salvador changed his underwear constantly and his trousers fairly often, but wore

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the same waistcoat and jacket months on end. Maximillian III Ignats considered it *his* constitutional duty to ride round Bella throwing largesse of, so he thought, gold coins to the throngs; actually his purse was kept purposefully filled with newly-minted extra-heavy *copperka* constantly coined for the purpose. Salvador Ignats spent most of his time in churches — eikons he could not learn to love — "Mamma, why are there so many ugly saints?" was his, perhaps, most well-known theological comment — but he had an absolute *passion* for the votive paintings which crammed the crumbling, smelly chapels of the Old Town. His favorite was said to be the so-called *Pathetic Exemplum of Makúshushka Daughter of the Master Chimneysweeper Brutsch Being Saved from a Sinking Rowboat by the Personal Intercession of the Archangel Angelo* [the Prince-Archbishop of Bella, for roundly insisting that there was no Archangel Angelo, was forever after referred to by Salvador Ignats as "that freemason"] *Limned in Minimally 37 Colors by the Master Limner-Painter Porushko, Believing without Cavil in the Faith which Was Given to the Saints.* Lucky, lucky Porushko! When votive painting had been scarce, he had done cigar-box covers; now he was enabled by Royal and Imperial patronage to spend six years and six months depicting — of course in advance! — the deathbed of Salvador Ignats: with its many, *many* figures of men and of women and of angels. Did it not remind one of the Greco's *Burial of Count Orgaz?*

Not very much.

Presently Ignats Louis rang a bell, the bell was answered by a Gentleman-in-Waiting, a middle-aged nobleman of many quarterings; "Listen, sonny," said the Presence, "tell the Grand Almoner that today for my gifts to the sick kiddies besides the posies let's have some chewy sweetmeats and some of the teeny-tiny toys, hey?"

"Certainly, Sire."

"And, oh, sonny?"

"Yes, Sire?"

The Presence went deep in thought. "Say. Sonny. Where is it, a place called something like . . . ah . . . *Froreland* . . . maybe . . . ?"

The Gentleman-in-Waiting was at no loss for words. "I could go look it up in the Postal Gazette, Sire."

The Presence, regarding this as something akin to brilliance, beamed. Nodded. The Gentleman-in-Waiting began to withdraw. Paused. "Sire. My humble obedience: *Where?*"

As it happened, the Brigand Boustremóvitch had for some while been planning an action involving a recusant boss-fishmonger unwilling to pay his racket-assessments in full and on time. On hearing the proposal of Bruto and of Pishto-the-Avar, the Brigand immediately saw how neatly his planned action would fit, and, placing two fingers into his mouth, gave a brief whistle to summon his henchmen. The negligent fish-dealer could

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wait . . . or, likelier, be entirely forgotten, in view of what was now to be a great change of scene for Boustromovitch: with buckets of ducats he would never need to bother with kettles of fish again — he might even skip, or skip through, Bulgaria, and head thence into Turkey-in-Europe (or, for that matter, -in-Asia), turn his coat and swear fealty to the Sultan and purchase the rule of a *sanjak*, or a *pashalik* like Little Byzantia, the southernmost semi-province of the Empire. In his suddenly-quickened mind he saw himself the founder of a dynasty, a new khedive, a new Obrenovitch or Karageorgevitch. . . .

"Yes, Brigand," the henchmen said. "Sure, Brigand! That's the way we'll do it, Brigand!"

"— and you, Vallackavo, go muck out the secret cell in the basement, and toss some clean straw into it —"

"Sorry, Brigand, the ceiling's already fall in on the secret cell in the basement."

"Then we'll use the one up in the wall!"

No one had seen the Boustremovitch so excited since the time he had burned the Tartar's toes; and when he shouted to them to **Get Moving now!**, they Got.

Count Magnus Calmar and Cornet Engelbert Eszterhazy absently observed a roughly-dressed fellow sitting in a doorway holding an empty bowl in his lap: propped against his body an equally-roughly-lettered sign bearing the initials of the words, MUTE. BLIND. DEAF. MERCY: equally absently dropped coins in it: continued their lighthearted conversation.

"You are sure that you would not rather go to Miss Betty's?"

"I am quite sure."

"Very well, then. I shall speak to my senior colleague, Lieutenant Knoebelhoffer, who is in the Equerries' Room accounted rather knowledgeable on Gypsy dances and dancers; perhaps we may be able to arrange it for, say, later this evening — perhaps only tomorrow."

"The sooner the better."

"Agreed. Ah. By the way. Ahem. As we continue our educational walk," they moved on, "you will observe to the left and across the street a rather smart new building which is the R.-I. Office of Commercial Statistics. Ahem."

Magnus made a wry mouth. Then he gaped. Then he smiled a rather rusty smile. "Allow me to make a note of that . . . Baron Borg uk Borg will be pleased. Hm. I suppose they must have lots of statistics about stockfish." He gave a faint sigh. They both moved forward to allow a train of six ox-carts laden with sacks of wheat to pass on along to Umlaut's Mills from the Great Grain Dock, where they had been unladen off barges.

Eszterhazy said, "You produce a great deal of stockfish, your

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countries, I mean; do you not?"

Magnus gave a heavy sigh, pressed his hand to his brow. "Och, God! Yes! We catch fish and we dry fish and we catch it and we dry it and . . . You see: Frore stockfish is cheaper, Scand stockfish is better, and so each country feels justified in demanding regulation against the other: quotas, imposts, duties — och, God! And of course neither one wishes to allow the demands of the other. We catch it and we dry it and we boil it and we eat it and we eat it and sometimes we eat it with hot mutton-fat and sometimes without and we have still more of it than we can eat and more of it than we can export. . . . And so, lacking the money to import wheat, often we . . . the people, I mean . . . are sometimes obliged to go without bread —" And he sighed, yet again, heavily.

Eszterhazy gave a sympathetic nod; sympathetic, yet abstracted. The Count Calmar had perhaps told him more about stockfish than he wished to know. The last of the heavy-laden ox-wagons had finally gone by, leaving behind a golden trail of grain spilled from some torn sack, which, as no one bothered to gather it up, the sparrows of the city had now begun to feed upon. Struck by some sudden and inchoate thought, he addressed himself to a woman of the people passing by with her shopping basket — "Excuse me, Mother, but what does stockfish cost these days?"

"Too much!" she snapped. "— when we can git it, that is ! Thank God that bread stays cheap."

Magnus's face had assumed once more that familiar vacant, almost rough stare. "My dear Engelbert, I want a drink," he said. "How does one say in your language, 'glög'? Or, for that matter: 'shnops'?"

Engelbert Eszterhazy noted — and reported — that they were quite near his Club; they at that moment passing in front of the smart new building, he stepped forward and bowed politely to a man who had just descended the steps with a portfolio under his arm. "Pray forgive my impudence, my dear Herra Chiefstatisticscouncillor, but —"

The man, under the double influence of being addressed by a title a full two grades higher than his actual one, and by someone with an immensely upper-class accent, stretched himself to his full height, puffed his chest, and said, "Command me."

"We were wondering . . . at the Palace . . ." The man's eyes began to pop. ". . . if there were any *known* reason why the commerce and trade between Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania and Far Northwestern Europe is not greater than it is. Surely my dear Herra *you* will know, eh?"

The chief (merely) clerk was obliged to swallow. Twice. "The reason is, my dear . . . my dear . . ."

"The Cornet Engelbert Eszterhazy for to serve God, the Emperor, and my lord Chief Statisticscouncillor." He handed his card.

"The reason is one of the economics of geography, a matter to which I, heh-hem, have paid especial attention. To ship, let us say —"

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"Let us say . . . oh . . . *grain* . . . wheat . . . just for instance."

To ship grain (for example, wheat) overland through Russia was to observe first-hand that it could be conveyed faster by a Vloxfellow with a wheelbarrow. Via water? Down the Ister to the Danube and thence to the Black Sea, into the Mediterranean, up the Atlantic — one sees the problem? Ideally, such a trade should pass by railroad via a direct northern route into Austria-Hungary, and thence — "Why not?" — Because, why not, there *was* no direct northern route. Such a route would needs pass through the demesnes of the Titular Majesty of Carinthia, and the Titular Majesty of Carinthia refused to allow it on the grounds that all steam engineers were Scotchmen, and all Scotchmen were heretics and had cut off the head of the piously Catholic Virgin Queen Victoria. Furthermore, the smoke of the locomotives would smutch her new-washed laundry. . . .

There being, alas, no glög available at the Club, the two young men had a shnops instead. They had a second shnops. Instead. Eventually and once again they parted in the Grand Lobby of the Windsor-Lido: at any event "Engli" would report back as soon as he could. In an excellent mood, the Count Calmar entered his suite and was about to open the door of the parlor when he noted that, for one thing, it was already open, and, for another, that the room behind it was not unoccupied.

"He is already late," said the dry, grim voice of the Baron Börg uk Börg; it was not even an angry or even an annoyed voice. It was only — as always — a disapproving voice. "I had planned to read him this very short minute I have written, it is only ten pages, on the present state of the Triune Monarchy. But he is already late." The scratch of a pen indicated the presence of the industrious Kopperkupp.

Magnus knew he could not, simply could not, enter and sit still for a ten-page minute; he tiptoed out and, observing in the small private lobby a pair of neatly-furled umbrellas, took one and put it under his arm. He could have given no reason why, so perhaps the two glasses of shnops would have to serve as reason.

He had not gone very far, nor did he have any clear idea where he was going, when a rather roughly-dressed man separated himself from a knot of workingmen doing no particular work, and approached. That this fellow bore a very close likeness to the beggarman blind and mute and deaf to whom he had given alms not long ago did not occur to him; he did not remember having given alms. And the man came very close and said, "Hey, *meester*, pssst! You like see Turkish Gypsy dancing-girl?"

Later: "Füi! *Ee*yoo! This stuff stinks," said the "beggarman," looking around.

"Otto of roses is one thing," said Pishto-the-Avar. "And chloroform's another."

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The Skraeling, when he hunts the walrus on the ice, attempts to convince the walrus that he, the Skraeling, is another walrus, pulling himself along on his elbows as he lies full-length stretched-out. To employ this same tactic in the streets of a large city requires some change of details, but the principle remained sufficiently the same so that Eeiiuullaalaa (a.k.a. "Ole Skraelandi," "Ole Frori") was not intercepted. He could not read what was painted on the side of the wagon into which his Sovereign had been swiftly thrust, but his nose told him it was strongly associated with fish . . . and not stockfish, either . . . it went off as rapidly as a fish-wagon could possibly go without arousing suspicion. He walked after it until it turned a corner; then he ran, loped, or trotted; to one who had chased reindeer, a fishwagon was nothing. When he got in sight of it again, he walked again; if it was not in sight he followed its trail of scent until it came in sight. Those who saw and noticed (not the same thing at all) perhaps docketed him as a quarter-cast Tartar in a slightly odd cap; but this was no reason for stopping him. And, in fact, no one did stop him.

He was not even thinking of the possibility that he might eventually become winded when he saw a gate open in a high wall, the wagon roll and rattle inside, the gate close. Nearby to where he stopped was a tree, a mulberry, a rather old and rather tall one. In Skraeland grew no mulberry trees, for in Skraeland grew few trees at all, but the Skrae shamans knew about trees nonetheless, and one of the things they said about them was, "Where there are no crags, eagles dwell in trees." From within the walls wherein his unfortunate Ruler was now captive came, subdued by distance, some shrill whistles; these (the Brigand Boustremóvitch was giving orders to his henchmen) — plus that just-remembered saying, reminded him of what he had to do. The *toom-toom* he had, as always, with him; but the *toom-toom* he had not now *here* with him: it was within its flat case, packed within his box at the hotel. But he had the other thing-of-power with him, and so now he thrust his hand into his bosom and he drew it out. It was wrapped in the skin of an entirely-black ermine tail, worn smooth and darkened by age; the thing-of-power had not been new when the first Court Shaman brought it with him first to Frorigarth and then to S'Brigidsgarth, and no one now remembered the name of the (pre-missionary, entirely pagan) shaman who fashioned it from the wing-bone of the large male eagle he had captured and — after a well-sung apology — killed. Ole chanted the *Beginning Chant* as the *Beginning Chant* was always sung.

Then he placed the whistle in his mouth, there as high in the old tree as it was prudent to climb, and began, in quick, sharp bursts, to blow it.

He did not know to whom he was whistling: to whom, in the realm below, his shrill cry for help was addressed; mainly he had in mind the

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spirits of the upper and the lower air. Partly — though not with much hope — he thought that perhaps there might be shamans here in this distant city or not very far from it . . . if not precisely fellow shamans then at least a one or two with some similar knowledge and who, recognizing the burden of his shrill cry, could come — somehow — to his aid. And besides: what else had he to do? And what else *could* he do?

Having left the Bureau of Parks, Forests, and Lands, Emma Katterina and her suite (popularly denominated as "three witches and a priest") headed outward for the Office of the Privy Purse, there to collect yet another batch of "pensions"; some of them in her own right, and some of them as widow of the very long-late Margrave of the Ister, Ignats Louis's elder half-brother. It had been a tangled Succession-to-the-Throne; and, rather than tangle it further still, the Royal and Imperial Family had preferred to pay. And pay. And pay. It did not, as such things were recokoned, pay much; but — who had known the woman would live so long? — *it was still paying!* The five eventually reached the Five Points, where the major routes through the city disembogued, were obliged to detour along the left side of the road because navvies laying gas-pipes had deeply trenched the east side. Emma Katterina had been waddling wearilessly along; suddenly she stopped, an odd expression on her face. The Baroness Bix and Bix, one of her Ladies in Waiting, asked, a trifle anxiously, "What, The Mamma?"

The Titular Queen of Carinthia was at no loss. "What, you can't hear? What, your ears are stopped with wax and dirt and infidelity? *The Satan is fifing!*" And, in a sudden second of silence, it seemed to them that, lo! the Satan *was* fifing! Had they, the old woman and her chaplain and her three handmatrons, at that moment found themselves in some sort of suddenly constructed sound-trap, a . . . as it were . . . nexus, where the high thin notes which came from the shaman's eagle's wing whistle were being driven down and along by currents of wind and air and flowed, however briefly, there and thither . . . and thither and there only? However briefly?

Without more to-do, Emma Katerina knelt on the road-bed and, taking out her rosary, began to pray. And so, without more to-do, her Chaplain and her Ladies knelt on the roadbed and, taking out their rosaries, began to pray. Six fish-wives who had been to the Great Market to replenish their wares, on seeing this, set down their baskets and, ceasing to cry, *"Fresh! Fresh! A penny off, a penny off!"* knelt on the roadbed and, taking out their rosaries, began to pray. Seven superannuated housewives who had been on their way to the nearby Church of Saints Cyril and Methodius, knelt on the roadbed, took out their rosaries and began to pray. Eight coal-heavers coming along asked themselves what was going on here, and, reminding one another that it was Lent,

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knelt (rather rustily) upon the roadbed, and, after patting their pockets ("Got it here *some*where for sure — *ah! Knew* I'd got it!"), took out their rosaries and began to pray. The new-dug ditch was too broad to be leaped, and inside of three minutes the entire Five Points had become impassable. And while the constantly increasing throng knelt reciting endless rosaries (or, in the case of those of Other Denominations, the doxologies in Old High Hyperborean, Ancient Avar, Medieval Slovatchko, Reformed Romanou, and other liturgical languages of the polyglot Empire), the staff of SS. Cyril and Methodius ordered the churchbells to be rung — thus alerted, so did those of the not-quite-so-nearby Churches of St. Gleb, St. Boris, St. Vladimir, Holy Affliction, St. Nicholas of Myra, St. Peter in Chains, St. Catherine the Martyr, SS. Cosmo and Damian Healing the Sick Without Charge . . . the sounds of their bells spread like ripples. While all this was going on, steam-trams, horse-cars, omnibuses, wagons, private carriages, pedestrians, all piled up behind each other, clogging the streets as far as the Swing Bridge, and farther enough to prevent it from swinging, thus tying up the traffic on the Little Ister and even the Ister, and thus — also — preventing the Late Lunchtime Freight from passing across Stanislavs Street, thus tying up rail traffic as far away as Budapest and Belgrade. . . .

Three men in a fruit and vegetable wagon asked each other what was going on? They could fathom out no answer. Said one, "Well, whatever, we can't get through here and we must be at the Palace Children's Infirmary on time; turn at the right —" "Just as impassable! The devil!" "Keep on and turn at the next left —" "No use! What —?" "Whip up and head for Garlicstringer's Gulley!" They lashed the horse. They pressed on. And on. But ever they seemed pressed farther and farther from the way they would go, and anxiously they scanned the faces of the church-tower clocks, and, with growing concern, compared their watches.

Three charcoal-burners had come down from the White Mountain to sing for money in the streets according to old-time custom, clad in shaggy goatskins: one with a timbrel, and one with a drum, and one with a rattle and a bell; the intention being to collect enough money to have a good old drunk at the end of Lent before heading back up-hill with what might be left — said, suddenly, one to the other, of a sudden looking up: "Say, brother, ain't that a eagle?"

"A course that be a eagle, brother! That ain't no magpie!"

"Makes a man feel at home . . . almost . . ."

"Say , we ain't comed hear to watch birds, there's a bunch a people up ahead, let's give'm four or five verses of *By the Limpid Forest Pool See the Chaste Gertruda Bathing Bare-ass.*"

By and by the Police traced the bottle to the neck.

No one of course dared order Emma Katterina to arise, but attempts were made to order her Ladies and her Chaplain: "Up with you,

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Madame. Up, Father, up! Get up, Lady — now!" Lips and fingers continued moving, eyes swung to the Royal Mistress. Her reply was brief. "The Mamma wouldn't let," said she.

The Countess Critz could not restrain a word of triumph to the baffled Police official; "Away, Antichrist!" she cried.

Hers was a very piercing voice.

The word spread to and through the superstitious and ever-turbulent South Ward that "Big Katinka was a-keeping Antichrist at bay," whereat the locksmen in the Grand, the Royal, and the Little Canals downed levers as one, thus blocking canal traffic; with repercussions all the way to 's Gravenhage and Rostov-on-Don; and the stokers in the R.- and I.-Central Steam Plant raked out the fires under their boilers and sounded the Great Alarm Whistle to blow off all the steam. Then they pissed on the embers to put them all quite out. And then they trooped along to join the throng.

"This bloody Gulley is bloody unpaved!" one of the men in the wagon cried. "Slow down, slow down, slow —"

"We haven't the time," said another, panting, "the clock in the Work is set and no one can break the seal without setting it off — oh God! Oh God!"

Still loyal to his faith in something which could not be proven, namely the nonexistence of Deity, another said, sweaty face gleaming, "There is no God."

"Well, I bloody well believe that! Look, look! The *next* through street is packed and blocked! Oh God!"

"Oh God!"

Farther away. The sacristan of the Uniate Hyperboreans' Procathedral, who had in recent years grown as cracked as his peal of bells, on hearing of the attempted approach of Antichrist, ran wildly up into his belfry and pealed them all. The Uniate Hyperboreans' Procathedral lay in the East Ward, whither the confusion had yet in its full form to spread, and where in consequence the trams were still running. The tram-switchmen in the East Ward, however, by the rankest kind of nepotism, were Uniate Hyperboreans every-man-jack of them; no sooner had the tinny tintinnabulation of "their" bells rung out than, taking it for a sign, or at least a signal, they leapt from their hutches and threw their switches. Thirty-three trams were more than sufficient to block Gumbarr Street as it crossed the Avenue Anna Margerita; whereat, puzzled beyond patience as to what was going on, the Royal and Imperial Telegrapher on duty in the Gumbarr St. office tapped along an open wire the query — perhaps unfortunately couched in the form of a proverbial question — **The Turks have entered Vienna?** It was certainly unfortunate that, having given up spirituous beverage for Lent, his fingers suddenly trembled so that he could not at once add, **Interrogation Point** . . . for at once all

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the Receiving Telegraphers still on the wire ran to the doors of their offices and shouted at the tops of their lungs, "*The Turks have entered Vienna!*"

The duty of Great Bell Ringer at the Old Tower of the Old Cathedral had traditionally been filled by the largest galley-slave on the Ister, it being assumed that only such labors could develop backs and arms to toll Great Gudzinkas, as the immense Bell (cast in Moscow during the reign of Anna and brought hither at vast expense) was called. Named after Algirdas Gudzinkas, the great Lithuanian metallurgist, engineer, and friend of Dr. Swedenborg, it had last been *officially* rung in celebration of a report that Bonaparte had been killed by an elephant whilst crossing the Alps (this report turned out to have been false). It had last been *actually* rung when Mazzimilian the Mad had — briefly — regained his sanity: an act so totally impermissible that Authority had ever since steadfastly denied that it had been rung at all.

It was long since there were galley-slaves. The current Great Bell Ringer was a convicted murderer on ticket-of-leave, one Gronka Grimka, called (and for very good reason) the Slovatchko Giant. He was sitting, as usual, scowling in his kennel and smoking the vile black tobacco known as Death-to-the-Vlox, when the Archbishop's cook ran hysterically across the yard, waving her apron and ululating as she ran.

"Why are you *sit*ting there, by-blow of a hobgoblin?" she howled. "*Haven*'t you heard? *The Turks have entered Bella! Ring the Big Bell!*"

Ordinarily Gronka Grimka would not have cared if the Turks had entered Heaven or Hell, let alone Bella, which he despised; but it was fixed tradition that "whosoever got to ring Great Gudzinkas would receive the Most Gracious Pardon, 17½ pieces of gold, a barrel of the best good goose-grease, and a double-pension, too." He rose to his feet rather like the rising of the Nile, and, first crossing himself and then spitting on his immense and horny palms, muttered his national imprecation of "Bugger the Bulgars," and climbed up into the belfry without delay. The immense engine there moved slowly, but by no means silently. The sound of the turning of the huge iron wheels over which the cable-thick bell-ropes passed, presently rumbled through the air, causing all the servants still on their feet within a square mile to fall on their knees, under the impression that they were hearing "Satan's chariots." And soon the dull, clamorous *boom-boom . . . boom-boom . . .* of Great Gudzinkas himself sounded throughout almost the whole city.

There was an ancient piece of ordnance, a veteran, in fact, of the French crossing of the Ister, situated on the Old High Rampart; it was of course by now purely ornamental, but Ignats Maurits had ordered it be kept charged. The order had never, somehow, been rescinded: informal motto of the R. & I. Artillery: "Follow an order even if it falls off a cliff." Nevertheless, a certain common sense was employed in regard to the Old

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French Gun, to wit, "Under no circumstance is the Old French Gun to be fired except at the order of the direct superior officer, or the King-Emperor Himself if there present, or at the sounding of the Great Big Bell." And at the sounding of the Great Big Bell, Cannonry-Corporal Moomkotch performed a neat about-face, bringing his knee up to his belt-level, and down again, *stamp*, produced a large wooden sulfur-match from his pocket, struck it on his boot-sole, and calmly touched it to the touch-hole of the Old French Gun. It went off with an immense **boom**! The ball whizzed high, dropped low, struck very near a certain large old mulberry tree, skimmed along the street like a giant bowling-ball, and buried itself in the wall of a mouldering old palace — to the pleasure of a wandering Swiss street photographer who, having set up his equipment, had just then taken a test shot.

"They have us in range!" cried the Brigand Boustremóvitch.

"That's what all the noise is about!" cried a henchman.

"Better beat it, Boss," advised another.

"We will sell our lives dearly!" cried the one-time terror of the Glagolitic Alps.

In the secret cell in the upper wall, Magnus sat up on his straw.

"What was that?" he cried. He had an absolutely terrible taste in his mouth.

Cornet Eszterhazy, having retrieved his horse from the livery stable where he had left it, the better to assist the Count Calmar stretch his train-trip-rusted legs, cantered along towards the Palace, his mind pleasantly at ease as usual. Now and then something beckoned to the corner of his eye . . . a quaint old shop, weather-worn sign, **Bookbinder, Old Books for Sale**, but who would wish to dismount and rummage among old books? Or a mountebank bound in chains from which, when sufficient small coins were produced, would emerge, straining and groaning, or some drunken wretch lying half in the road, or . . . He turned the horse and cantered back; what else had caught his eye he was not quite aware, but there was some pressing thought to go back and see . . . where had it been? He looked to right and left; presently — sure enough! Halfway up the next, half-empty block, he saw something lying in the road; thither he went to get it.

If it were not the very same English cap which Magnus had been wearing not long before, then it was its twin; and as not that many people in Bella would have had an English cap, very likely it was indeed the same: how came it there?

The drunken wretch in the gutter had pulled himself out of it and was now propped against a lamp-post; he addressed Eszterhazy.

"It fell out of a wagon, like, my lord —"

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"When? What wagon? Who —"

"A fish-wagon. Come rattling along and knock me right over; help a poor veteran of the Wendish Wars, my lord; no friends at Headquarters and so hence no pension; to buy a nibble of bread, my lord?"

"A noggin of rum would be more like it —"

"Well, there's that, my lord. There's that. 'Man liveth not by bread alone,' as the Scripture tell us. Thank you, my lord! Thank you!"

The cornet bethought him a moment, trotting back to the broader street. The cap had fallen *out* of a wagon. Why had "Count Calmar," or "Count Calmar's" cap, been *inside* a wagon? A fish-wagon? On the spur of the moment, he turned and headed back to the Grand Hotel Windsor-Lido. And there in the grand lobby he saw the Baron Bŏrg uk Bŏrg, literally wringing his hands.

"Cornet! Cornet! There's a report that His Maj—— that Count Calmar — he was late, he was late, he did not in fact return — that he was seen being attacked and forced into a fish-wagon! A *fish*-wagon! The King of Scandia and Froreland! Not alone the possible danger to the poor young man, young and impetuous though he sometimes is — and heedless — it is only the Crown which keeps the Two Kingdoms together — it is nothing that I shall surely be forced to resign and that they will send me to be a petty postmaster at some Skrae trading-post on the Arctic Ocean —"

"Is this his cap?"

The courtier seized it, sniffed it, turned it partly inside out. "Essence of Lilac, his very hair-tonic; and look! Look! The label!"

GOUSTAVV GOUSTAVVSON
HABERDASHER, S'BRIG.

"Then immediately we must notify your Minister and the Police."

The Baron moved hand and face in a slight gesture of deep despair. "I have already despatched messengers to both, but — I don't at all understand — they say there is some disturbance in the central section of the city and that the messengers may have some difficulty getting through to —"

The suave and practiced smile on the glossy face of the assistant manager vanished at Eszterhazy's peremptory manner. "Yes, of course, Cornet, the Grand Hotel Windsor-Lido *does* have a private contract telegraph office, just next the cashier's . . . but there seems to be some trouble on the line, and I am afraid that —"

A privy councillor walked by, curling his large moustache and conveying on his arm a handsome younger woman who, whoever she was, was certainly not the frow privy councillor; he raised his eyebrows in acknowledgement of the assistant manager's sycophantic smile; again the smile vanished abruptly.

"This foreign milord, Baron Bŏrg, is on an important mission; you

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will go with him and see that a constant attempt is made to get his telegrams through and you will remain with him until then or even longer if he asks you. We would hate to commandeer this place." Thus spake Cornet Eszterhazy.

With a word or two and a salute, he left, walking rather rapidly to the alley where the horse waited for him. Yet, upset as he was, he could not but laugh a little as he recalled his own brash words.

We!

He quickly remounted his horse, and, looking up as he did so, he saw, flying rather low overhead, an eagle . . . and another eagle . . . and another . . . and another . . . and another . . . and . . .

The Turkish Legate in Bella at that time was Selim Ghazi Effendi, commonly called "Grizzly Pasha," who had been exiled from Paris for gross peculation and other high misdemeanors; and now spent his days and his nights stupefied with opium, which he smoked (mingled with Latakia and Makedonia and Otto de Rose) in his huge mother-of-pearl-inlaid hookah. Now, as the Great Big Bell boomed on, and he vaguely heard the sole sound which filled the sky, he looked from a dream which he saw very clearly in his charcoal brazier of the Blessed Houri dancing in Paradise . . . a place which he was pleased but not surprised to observe very much resembled his former villa near Neuilly. He said, "*Mmmuhhh?*"

The Legation's *kawas* appeared at his elbow. "Shadow of the Shadow of God," the *kawas* said, "the *giaours* are saying that the Troops of the Faithful are at the portals of this stinking city."

Grizzly Pasha said. "*Mmmuhhh . . .*"

By and by he gestured. "At once, Shadow of the Shadow of God," the *kawas* said.

Presently the rather lop-sided coach which, once a year, the Legate was roused to ride to the Exchequer, where a token rent for Little Byzantia was paid over to him for transmittal to Constantinople — the rest being more crisply sent on via Coutt's Bank — the coach, accompanied by five gaunt and elderly Kurd lancers (mounted upon five equally elderly and gaunt horses, and looking like a quincunx of quixotes); the coach rolled out of the grounds of the Legation and into the East Ward . . .

Most of the telegraphers having left their keys to go home and protect their families, the police had resorted to the Army heliograph; this device (aided by telescope) now flashed the news that TURKISH TROOPS HAVE BEEN SEEN IN THE EAST WARD; the sugar, butter, and flour dealers at once doubled their prices and prepared to barricade their premises.

It was in the mind of the Pasha merely to indicate that the building they were approaching was to be appropriated for the benefit of his younger brother; what he said, however, was "*Mmm . . .*" and then, his tongue suddenly clearing somewhat, "That one —" The coach turned in the

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carriage-path, rolled up to the porte-cochère; stopped. The Pasha promptly dozed off. The Bulgarian Minister was playing backgammon with the wife of the Bulgarian First Secretary, when a startled servant informed him that the Turkish Legate had arrived.

"*Bozhemoie*, what does that impotent old paederast want here?" he asked. But under the porte-cochère he said, "*Altesse, Altesse, mille fois bienvenu!*"

"The keys, *Giaour*," said Grizzly Pasha. And paused.

"The keys, Your Highness? *At once. Cer*tainly. *Which* keys?"

Another pause. The Pasha had after all been in many cities; if he were not immediately sure which one he was in now, the doubt must be forgiven him.

Yet another pause. "The keys . . . the keys to Belgrade, *Giaour*," said Grizzly Pasha. "*Mmmuhh. . . .*"

The Bulgarian Minister, who was a Bulgarian, was perplexed; the Bulgarian First Secretary, who was an Armenian, was not. In less than a minute he had returned with the largest keys available (they were those of the potting-shed, big and brass and bright), reposing on the red plush cushion which usually served for the repose of his wife's pet poodle. "*Alors, voici, Altesse, les clefs à Belgrade, avec grande submission*," he said, offering them up. What, after all (his manner enquired) was Belgrade to him, or he to Belgrade?

Grizzly Pasha accepted and dropped them negligently in his lap, whence they slipped unnoticed to the carriage floor. Then he blinked. Then he said, "Three days looting for the troops." Then he saw a plate, hastily prepared with bread and salt, also being thrust into his hands. "Oh, very well, then," he conceded, in a disappointed tone. "We spare your lives, and your churches need not become mosques, either. But," he licked his dry mouth with a dryer tongue, frowned; "Ah yes! A hundred thousand pieces of gold, a hundred pretty boys — fat, mind you, *very, very* fat! A glass of quince sorbet, and a dancing-girl (also fat). At once, *getir!*"

The sorbet, at least, was quickly brought. And then, to the tune of a music-box, the wife of the First Secretary (she had been born in Cairo, and was of a rather full figure) performed a beautiful belly-dance. Until the *soi-disant* Occupier of Bella fell suddenly asleep. And was wheeled back home in his carriage rather more rapidly than he had come. The Kurdish lancers were getting on in years, and badly wanted their yogurt.

"*Bozhemoie!*" said the Bulgarian Minister. "The things one has to put up with, here in Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania!"

His First Secretary shrugged. "Your Excellency may light a candle to his saint that he has been spared my first post, a place called St. Brigidsgarth, where the sun does not shine from one year to another what with night and fog and mist and where one eats boiled stockfish with

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mutton-fat."

His Excellency shuddered. "Where was *that*?"

The First Secretary thought for a moment. "It is in Froreland," he said at last. "*Isn't* it?"

"*Bozhemoie!*" said His Excellency.

Then he said, "*Where?*"

And meanwhile? What of the "three witches"?

Very soon the Countess Bix and Bix began to feel that all prayers might be safely left to The Mamma and her Chaplain. Her own best guns were of another order, and consisted of a deck of worn and greasy old cards concealed inside the lining of her musty old muff of marten-skin. Squatting on the dung-smeared stone paving-blocks, she began to lay them out in the antique — the terribly, terribly antique pattern of the Abracadabra:

ABRACADABRA
ABRACADABR
ABRACADAB
ABRACADA
ABRACAD
ABRACA
ABRAC
ABRA
ABR
AB
A

(**Perish like the word** it meant . . . or rather was supposed to mean; actually it should have been Abdacadabra, the ancient error of confusing the *Resh* with its near look-alike the *Dalet* had been committed by a scribe unskilled in Aramaic sometime in the days of Darius (or was it Tiberius?) and had never been corrected: **Perish like the word** it should have meant, but though blurred its power was, yet potent, as witness its still being used.)

Hers was no ordinary Adversary or Opponent — and, then, hers were no ordinary cards, for they bore (all of them) the *BAPHOMET* on their backs. What were they *made* of? Perhaps parchment. What was the *parchment* made of? Do not ask.

And of the second of the "three witches"? The Countess Critz?

The Countess Critz — as the drone of the growing throng increased — reached through a bottomless pocket in her skirt and rummaged till she found the pouch she wanted: *not* the one with the dried apple for sassy stepdaughters, *no*: the — First she spread out her moth-eaten woolen shawl, then she spread her worn old silk handkerchief. Next from the very small pouch came a smaller ball, the covering of it the scrotum-skin of an all-black bull-calf: the game she played resembled jacks but she used no

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jacks. Instead of jacks she cast out and gathered in, cast out and gathered in as the small ball bounced, cast out and gathered in the bright-white teeth of a hangman who had been hanged. And all the while she whined and she sing-songed and she chanted in the words of a language so old that (save for this sole incantation) it had quite died before the invention of any signs or letters which could write it.

And the third of the "three witches"? The Highlady Grulzakk had her own rôle to play; taking from a packet concealed in her rusty bosom she shook out into her dirty cracked palm a pair of rude dice carved from the ankle-bones of a wild white jackass, and began to play at dice with the Devil for the fate of Bella; not to give the Prince of Hell too much of a chance, she cast his dice with her left hand — but even so the fate of Bella was far too important to be left to a throw of dice, and therefore she used loaded dice. "Never give the Devil an even break" was her motto.

Thus, the Highlady Grulzakk.

Down the road from the Bulgarian Ministry and in a somewhat, but only somewhat, larger building: "Gin'ral Abercrombie," asked the wife of the American Minister to the Triune Monarchy, "is they any ice for to make a nice cool glass o' liminade?"

"Not a morsel, my little honey-bee; I have already checked, but for some reason unaccountable the iceman has not yet arrived," said H.A.B. Abercrombie, formerly Sutler-General to the Army of the Missoula.

"Oh, I am jest drinched with presspiration!"

"Endure it, my dear dew-drop, for the sake of Our Great Republic; it is no hotter here than back in La Derriere, Del., and pays much better."

"I b'lieve I'll take off my corset and put on my wrapper and go lie in the hammock you hung between thim funny old iron rengs sut in the walls down in that nice cool deep ol' cellar."

"Do so, my dear, till the cool of the evening. How I wish I might join you and do likewise, but duty calls. 'Toil,' she says. 'Toil on, toil on, toil —' " But Mrs. General had not tarried to hear.

"Safe for hours," muttered the General. He glanced at himself in the tall pier-glass. More than one had commented on his resemblance to the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, a point which he felt obliged to concede, although his own figure was perhaps a trifle fuller. Next he rang for his butler. General Abercrombie had learned neither Gothic nor Avar, the principal tongues of the Triune Monarchy; and to foreigners wherever he found them, used the language he had learned in a previous diplomatic station (except to servants back home, to whom he might better have spoken in Gullah or Gaelic). "Boy," he said, "washee whiskey glassee in office. Callee my horsee and buggy. And, ah, by the way . . . Boy . . . you know where findee Turkey Gypsy sing-song girly?"

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There was at that time in Bella, pitching its canvas tents and touching up the paint on its wagons, in the Old Tartar Paddock, an entertainment entitled the Major James Elphonsus Dandy's Great Texas and Wild West Show; it was really a rather small outfit, a generation or so ahead of its time, but it always managed to pay the bills. Jim Dandy himself, an old goat-looking man and a veteran of the Mexican and Civil Wars, had been giving licks here and there with his paint-brush when along came his partner, Tex Teeter, looking mighty thoughtful.

"Roan Horse has got the spirit up, Jim. Moanin and carryin on. I wanted you should know." He squatted down on his hunkers.

"Drunk again, I spect."

"Nooo. Not drunk a-tall. Keeps moaning that Yellow Hair is in bad trouble. Says he hears the death whistle. And like that."

"Who in the Hell is Yellow Hair?"

"Well now Jim I don't rightly know. But hain't that what the Injuns call George Custer?"

Dandy snorted. "Know whut *I* call George Custer. His outfit was next to mine at Bull Run, he weren't hardly used to war, twas whut you might call his first stand and he hardly stood it a-tall. Well. How come he sendin smoke signals to Roan Horse — if it *be* him?"

Teeter pushed to one side on his head the high-crowded derby which he like most cattlemen preferred to the broad Stetson with its ridiculous flappy brim, though newspaper and magazine artists somehow preferred to depict the latter. "Oh it beats *me* Jim. But I say that the Horse has got the spirit up, an — Ho. Hey! Looky thar! In that buggy yander! Hain't that that old jack-ass Hiram Abiff Abercrombie?"

Jim Dandy squinted and peered. "Why I do b'lieve tis. Might's well give'm a hoot and a toot." He moved into the vehicle whose paint he had been touching up. A moment later a blast of steam smote the air, followed at once by a rather rough but immediately recognizable bar of *Rally Round the Flag*. The buggy drew up till it was enveloped in its own dust, the driver stood up and, leaning forward, looked around; then waved his arm, sat down, and drove towards them. "But say, you ott not t'call him a old jack-ass; he is after all a high government official an a veteran of the Great Rebellion."

Teeter snorted. "Great . . . Humbug. Spent the war in them Territories, sellin bad booze to the Injuns an the paroled Rebel prisoners supposed t'ward 'em off, of which I was one — bad *pies*, too! Oh Lordy them was bad pies — crusts soft as mush, and the dried apples hard as leather." And together the two men recited the well-known verse:

I loathe, detest, abhor, despise,
Abominate dried apple pies. . . .

"Major Dandy," said Abercrombie, getting out of his buggy. "Corporal Teeter."

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"How do," said the major, offering his grizzled paw.

"Mm," said the corporal. Not doing so.

"Oh come come now. Let us bury the bloody shirt and clasp hands across the something-or-other chasm; boys, my rye's all gone — *got anything to drink?*"

Jim Dandy said he supposed they could broach the barrel of bourbon. "Though mind you, sparingly. The treasury is mighty low, and if no customers show up we'll have to cancel the evenin show."

General Abercrombie said, "Some sort of religious rally has got downtown tied in knots. No idea why; I do not hold with superstitions they being largely spread by Irish Jesuits, no offense to any mackerel-snappers who might be present. As for the other matter, poot! Breach the barrel and pour its contents out with a lavish hand; the Government of the United States shall pay for it; I'll put it down as ENTERTAINMENT OF IRREGULAR CAVALRY." He fluttered his eyebrows and he licked his lips.

After a moment, former-Corporal Teeter asked, only slightly grudgingly, "How's the Mrs.?"

"Sweating. That woman could sweat in the middle of a blizzard." He nodded thanks, raised his glass. "To the glorious American eagle, long may it scream." They drank.

"Well, now, your Mrs. a fine woman. Though the union did seem to me a bit mysterious. You'n her, I mean. *Different*."

Abercrombie uttered a suspiration of content "Mystery? Not at all. She was a woman of a certain age who had never been married and I was an office-holder out of office. Her uncle is Senator Adelbert de la Derriere, of Delaware, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, and a *staunch* Republican with his pockets full of patronage; there is no mystery; say, aren't you going to give all hands a drink?"

Jim Dandy re-entered the cabin of his steam-calliope. Another blast of water music smote the air, followed by the music to the line, "There's Whiskey in the Jar." Figures seemed to arise out of the earth, holding cups, mugs, jam-glasses, and pannikins. "Make you all acquainted," said Tex, as Major Jim poured. "Bloodgood Bixbee; Cockeyed Joe; Deadwood Dick; Vermont Moses; Hebrew Moses; Shadrack Jackson, a former black buffalo soldier; Gettysburg Sims —"

"Gentlemen. Delighted."

"Lance-Thrower, Big Prairie Dog, Minnetonka Three Wolves, Roan Horse, Crow-Killer —"

"Don't stop pouring. My Redskinned friends. Delighted. In war, enemies. In peace, friends. But. Roan Horse. Why the paint?"

In a dolorous chant, Roan Horse announced that Yellow Hair was in trouble, that he (Roan Horse) saw many smokes and heard the deathwhistle and heard the eagle scream . . . and that the sun either wouldn't rise or wouldn't set. He uttered a groan, and began to drink.

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"What's all this about, boys?"

Teeter grunted. Smacked his lips. Told him. "Pshaw," said the United States Minister. "More superstition!"

"Well. Gen'ral, you think just as you like, but *last* time Roan Horse had the spirit up, was't the last time — the first time — don't matter; why he set around moaning *Frog, Frog,* complained he had pains in the small of his back something fierce; whut come to pass? Hardly a few days later we heard the French Emperor had a attack a thuh kidney colic something fierce and had surrendered his hull army to the Proosians, now didn't we, Jim?"

"Well, that's for true. We did. Say, who is *this*?"

"This" was a uniformed figure who came galloping up on a light-cavalry-type horse; quickly dismounting, he asked, "Sir. Are you not the American Minister?"

"I am, young sir. And you?"

The young sir said that he was Engelbert Eszterhazy, an Imperial Equerry; he seemed extremely agitated, maintaining his composure with some difficulty. "Ah, thank God, Your Excellency, I thought I recognized your vehicle — Sir! A terrible situation has arisen. The Count Calmar has evidently been kidnapped, and I am unable to get across the city or through the city in order to report it to any of our authorities; I don't know what is happening, and I entreat your help as an emissary."

"Have a drink, Cornet."

"No, no, I —"

"Cornet, an emissary of a friendly nation to the Court of your country, I direct you to have a drink!" A tin cup being put in his hand, young Cornet Eszterhazy drank. To be precise, he gulped. He shuddered. He staggered, put out an arm for balance. The cowboys laughed. Even the Indians smiled.

"*This* is not Tokay!" he gasped.

"Ho, ho. No, it is not Tokay, merely the same color; finish it before you tell me why you want my help. Go on now. Bottoms up!"

The Cornet perforce obeyed, but in some stiff sips rather than one main gulp. Breathing strongly, he wiped his mouth. "I want your help to rescue Count Calmar!"

General Abercrombie gestured that all drinking vessels be refilled. Next, that all drink again. Then he said, "Well, Cornet Um Ahh Um — Well, Cornet. I fear this does not come within the scope of my official duties, sorry as I am for the noble gentlemen, Count Who?"

The Cornet removed his pannikin from his mouth. "Your Excellency, but he is only the Count Calmar incognito! In actual fact, he is King Magnus of Scandia and Froreland!"

This was received with no reaction by the assembled rough riders, who continued to stroll to and from the bourbon barrel. But General

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Abercrombie, whose drinks were being brought to him, allowed a look of deep thought to steal over his face. "Well, this seems to put a different complexion on — A reigning monarch is no mere — 'Scandia and Froreland,' do you say? Yes. Yes? Why, the subjects of the King of Scandia and Froreland have in recent years been migrating very numerously to the United States. They are hard-working, hard-drinking, quick to become naturalized though very much attached to their old homeland; they vote dutifully in all elections and they are almost all of them attached to that same Grand Old Party which has saved the Union. Why —"

Something had occured to Major James Elphonsus Dandy. "Say. This here king. Hasn't got yellow hair, has he?"

"Why yes. He has. Yes. He has."

The major gave a satisfied jerk of the head. "Well. There *y'are*. And, oh hey! *Nother* thing! Ain't them two countries whut they call The Land of the Midnight Sun? Why sure! Just like old Roan Horse said, 'The sun either won't rise or won't set,' well! There *y'are*; git your carbines ready, men."

Abercrombie leaned forward. "How do you know all this, my plumed, war-bonneted friend? And what else do you know about it?"

Roan Horse gave an enormous eructation. "Medicine Man send message. Not know *what* Medicine Man. He blow-em eagle whistle. Roan Horse hear." The Indian's eye-lids drooped. But between them his eyes still gleamed. "Umbrella tree," he intoned. "*Death. Umbrella tree. Yellow Hair. Many smokes. Eagle, eagle. Umbrella tree. . . .*"

Abercrombie asked Now what in the Hell they made of *that*.

Eszterhazy, somewhat more quieted, said that there was something . . . something in a corner of his mind . . . he could not quite . . .

Said Tex Teeter, pouring water (not much water) into his empty glass and swishing it around to collect the residual essence of whiskey: he said, slowly, "Now didn't we see some purely odd-lookin kind a tree down in them Eye Talian provinces, whut was they called but *um ber ella* pines, which shorely they looked like. Now —"

Slowly Eszterhazy put down his own empty glass, not looking as to where it went. And slowly he straightened up again. His air of concentration was almost palpable. It was, certainly, contagious. "The so-called umbrella pine," he said. "I have seen it in Italy, too. Is it here? In the Monarchy? In Bella? Yes. *Yes!* That is . . . a few specimen trees, I have heard, introduced into his palace grounds by . . . by whom? By *whom?*" Again he was silent; scarcely, he seemed to be there. Then his head snapped up. His face was luminous. "Yes! The Duke of Dalmatia! In the palace the old King gave him when the Duke was in exile . . . before there was even an Empire —"

"Well, and who lives there now, my dear young sir?"

Eszterhazy's face went first slack. Then it flooded with color. "It is now

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the lair of that dirty beast the Brigand Boustremóvitch," he said. His lips writhed up.

"Oh, sugar!" exclaimed the U.S. Minister. He was not noted for having knowledge of the local scene. But he had heard of the Brigand Boustremóvitch. "Well, well. Well, they may fire me for this and I may be lucky to get the post of postmaster in Lump Dicky, Arkansas, but I say Let-tus risk it! A commissioned officer of a great and friendly nation whose capital city lies in temporary disarray asks us to assist in rescuance from durance vile the captured sovereign of another great and friendly, where the Hell *is* the place? — they won't *dare* shoot *me*; I have diplomatic immunity;" (he also had the hiccups) "is there a bugle in the house; I'll sound the charge; I used to, as a boy, play wind instruments in the band of The Great Doctor B.B. Jaspers' Massive Medicine Pill Show; Dr. B.B. Jaspers' Massive Medicine Pills are so skillfully compounded out of benign marsh and meadow grasses and healing woodland herbs as to be good for the de-bilitating diseases of men and beasts alike, one for a man and two for a milch cow, as well as female complaints of a familiar nature, where the *Hell* is this place?"

Eyes swung to the young cornet. He started to gesture.

"The President of the U-nited States to Ignats Louis, Great and Good Friend, we the People of said U-nited States send our Servant Hiram Abiff Abercrombie in whom there is no guile — *Where?*"

Cornet Eszterhazy made a gesture of despair. Said, "I have, oh my God, lost my bearings."

"Well. Colonel, cain't you git a native guide?"

Roan Horse rose to his feet and re-adjusted his blanket. White circles were painted around his eyes, his nose was yellow, and red & black stripes ran along his face. "No need-em native guide," he said. "You see-em guide?" He pointed. "Follow," he said, stalking for his mount. Every eye looked up.

Eszterhazy said, "Sweet tears of Christ."

Up, up, and up, yet not so far up that they could not be clearly identified for what they were, from north, from east, from south, from west, four columns of eagles flew in upon the capital in a cruciform pattern: and at some point farther on in the city they converged. And circled.

A shout went up from the men of the show; and, waving their carbines, they ran for their horses. General Abercrombie (in his buggy of course) could not keep up with them, but he made good time, and kept the U.S. and Confederate flags being waved up front well in sight.

"Thish year steam calliope," Major Dandy explained to the watchman, "is made out of prime seasoned English oak and is as hard as iron, if not harder than *some* iron. It was tooken out of the *Lady Washington* steamboat, of which I was once Owner and Master, after she run aground

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off Garrett's Point; whut toon shall I give'm?" The watchman made no reply; for one thing, the calliope having gotten into motion had started moving forward and lurched out of the Paddock by then. "*Hail C'lumbia,* that's whut I'll give 'em, haw haw haw!" The vehicle did not run smooth. But she ran staunch. And soon the war-whoops and Rebel yells of the horsemen were mingled with the hoarse, steamy notes of the music.

"Chief! Chief! This just come through by heliograph!"

"Give it here. MONTEZUMA THE FAMOUS SLAYER OF THE MAXIMILLIAN EMPEROR HAS BEEN SEEN WITH A SQUAD OF IRREGULAR CAVALRY PLEASE FLASH INSTRUCTION; they've all gone mad, I tell you — *mad!*"

"He must be told, I say!"

"I say, not yet!"

"He must be *told!*"

"Tell him yourself, then —"

"It is not my function!"

"Lower your voice, for God's sake!"

Ignats Louis looked up in some mild annoyance from the interesting marginal gloss about Maurits Louis and the Lovely Mulatta, from which the (as it was called) Egyptian branch of the Morganatic branch of the Royal Family was descended; why were the officials always bothering him? Why couldn't they make decisions for themselves? What was the use of a Constitution, otherwise? He glanced at the clock, clicked his tongue, and went out through the secret panel and down the secret steps to visit the dear sweet little kiddies in the Infirmary three courtyards away. Sometimes he had half a mind to abdicate and go fish for sardines off Corsica . . . or else Chatanooga in the Americas and hunt wisents with the Red Faced People.

"There, now we have a clear road, make haste! Make haste!"

The driver, sweating, said, "This is not a clear road, it is only a road through a merely crowded street — don't you see the people?"

"Ride them down, then!"

"Ride the *people* down?"

"It would not be our fault but that of the enemy, for it is a definition that the enemy determines the conditions of the war!"

"I tell you, Boss, it's witchcraft — witchcraft — witchcraft!"

"Don't bray in my ear, you jackass!" The Brigand Boustremóvitch spat three times and rapped thrice on the table. The mention of the mere possibility of witchcraft made him uneasy . . . of course he had already had a great deal to be uneasy about. There had been, for example, the

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thunder-storm. Peals of thunder and bolts of lightning and the day sky as dark as night; bad enough; but it was plain that all that was happening only overhead the old Dalmatian Palace — all roundabout as they looked, lo!, the land was bright and clear! And after that had come the hail-storm, hail-stones big as plums — but only on top of *them*, the henchmen wailed. And after that had come the rain of frogs. And after *that* . . .

"Who'd y' think's doin it all?" demanded the Boustremóvich.

"Who else?" his henchman asked, jerking his head towards the upper secret cell. "You don't think somebody *that* big is going to travel around without he's got his private wizard, do ya?"

The Brigand struck the table with his huge fist. "I'll cut his throat with my own hands," he cried. "He'll be dead when they get him after the ransom, but we won't be here by then." Yet still he did not move; and now suddenly the walls oozed a liquid red as blood and a most offensive foetor filled the room; from outside and overhead began a most discordant screaming. The Brigand unsheathed his long curved knife and, with fearful curses, ran out into the courtyard where the by now very old umbrella pines still grew and dropped their needles — and every time he turned towards his destination, the immense convocation of eagles ceased to soar and circle, and, swooping, darted, claws outstretched, screaming, for his eyes. . . .

Up in a tower in another part of the city were four men in uniforms without insignia of any sort. They stood at the windows and gazed out with telescopes. "The set time is very near," said one of them, "and it is possible the clockwork in the infernal machine might go off early."

"Is it possible that we will learn what in Hades is going on down there?"

A third said that he was also very curious, but they would simply have to wait. "Until we either see or hear the explosion. Or both."

"Good God!" exclaimed the fourth. "Is it possible that the Emperor has for some or any reason left the Imperial Palace and that this is the reason for the commotion?"

There were gasps of dismay; then the first speaker said, "It is not possible, he is a creature of indestructible habit. However. I suggest that we coördinate our sightings. Let us each look out on a different direction and say what we see; agreed? Very well. *North*, what do you see?"

"Incredible congestion. A tangle of traffic. Nothing seems to be moving. Nothing at all."

"Just so. *South?*"

"A vast throng of people, choking the streets. They are all on their knees. Can they all be *pray*ing?"

"Who knows? As I am *East*, I — No. *No.* That cannot *be*. My eyes are

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suffering from retinal strain. *West*, will you please make your report?"

"Yes. I see lines of halted tram-cars, lines of halted canal- and river-boats, lines of halted railroad trains. Well *East*, will you now report?"

After another silent moment, *East* said, in an oddly-stiff voice, "I see the old Dalmatian Palace, wherein lives the paroled and pardoned Brigand Boustremóvitch. I see . . . I see. . . . Well, I see American Redfaced Indians in full feathers and war-paint and I see American Farvestern *covboyii* in fringed buckskins and they are all on horseback and they are riding round and round the old Dalmatian Palace and firing upon it and now I see a figure strongly resembling the American Minister in the odd horse-drawn vehicle he drives and he is blowing a trumpet and now just now I see an absolutely incredible vehicle which appears to contain a church-organ yet is clearly propelled by steam like a railroad engine and yet as you all know there are no railroad tracks in that part of the city. What can it mean? What does it all *mean?*"

His companions did not tell him what it all meant. Silently, they had one by one joined him and were gazing through their own telescopes out the east window.

Major James Elphonsus Dandy was not riding around the walls of the old Dalmatian Palace, however. Not quite. For one thing, he had slowed down just a bit to get another piece of sheet-music . . . something from *Mazeppa* would, he thought, be suitable.

Up in his secret cell, Magnus III and IV was on his feet. He was quite angry. In the larger sense, he had no idea where he was; in the narrower sense, he knew a cell when he saw one. He shouted and he heard shouts, but he also heard thunder and lightning and what sounded (he decided after a puzzled moment) like hail. And . . . did he hear . . . frogs? He gazed at the door. He tried the door. It was, unsurprisingly, locked. So he threw himself against it. Often. Although Magnus ("Count Calmar") was young and rather strong; and although the door-frame had been already set somewhat askew by the shell of the Old French Gun; and although the door seemed to give a bit; still: it did not open. So he stood back and thought. But he could think of nothing. Nothing, that is, except that his being here was all the fault of the Frores; what did they want of him with their incessant demands? Who *were* they, anyway, that the benign and far more efficient methods of the Scands were not good enough for them? Who were *they*, in their poor and difficult little country with its tiny fields half-way up ragged, rugged mountains and their rocky and inhospitable coast forever split by craggy fiords and their misty forests and unnavigable rivers full of shoals and falls — who were *they* — to make demands? Well, whoever, he would teach them a lesson: *he would sell them to the Swedes!*

Magnus did not know, and neither did Jim Dandy, that when the

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Patriot-Poet Burli Grumbleson was so suddenly asked to put his great National Poem to music it had equally suddenly occurred to him that a certain piece from *Mazeppa* would suit it perfectly; hence: the immortal anthem, *Froreland Forever*, now, suddenly and amidst a welter of other strange and baffling sounds, soaring through the air via the medium of a steam calliope. Magnus may have heard a steam calliope before, he may not; his reaction was not to the medium but to the song. Instantly tears gushed from his eyes. "Froreland!" he cried. "My poor country, my native land, *Froreland! Froreland!*"

That other native, the Skraeling "Ole," had also not been able to make his way back to the Grand Hotel Windsor-Lido by reason not of the congestion alone but because the Swing Bridge was blocked; he had been wandering hither and thither hoping to find a shallow place he might ford, when he heard an allarum of strange cries and the thudding of hooves. Neither he nor Roan Horse had ever seen each other before, needless to say; but there was an instant of recognition, a spark or perhaps even a flame passed between the shaman and the medicine-man. Roan Horse leaned from his saddle and reached out his arm, Eeiiuullaalaa jumped, seized, was lifted up, was sat down, and clutching his horse's mane lightly, charged on with the others and added his Skraeling ululation to their cries.

Round and round the old Dalmatian Palace they rode, and whenever a terrified face appeared over the parapet, they fired on it with whoops and yells. Major Dandy intended to turn his calliope so as to join the encircling pack, but the way thither had been rather rough and the tiller stuck . . . and stuck . . . and so, with full force, the massy engine struck the wall right under King Magnus' cell. The engine was not only massy, it was strong. It drew back, turned slowly and awkwardly, went farther back . . . and then rushed forward at full speed. It struck the gate and knocked it off its rusting hinges at just the moment when the cowboys and Indians came rounding the walls once again. And they poured into the fortress whose defenses had been breached.

Magnus heard and felt the concussion without knowing its cause; at once he attacked the door again: this time it gave way — he was free to go —

— to go — *where?*

There was certain peril down below, he thought (incorrectly . . . but logically). And then he saw the umbrella he had impulsively taken from the lobby of his hotel suite, one of two. He didn't know that he had clutched it tightly under his arm at the moment of his being assaulted; did not know that his captors, with coarse jests about *brolly* and *bumbershoot*, had heaved it into the cell with him; he might use it when the roof leaked, they sneered. "I shall climb to the parapet," Magnus said, "and I shall jump, having first opened the umbrella, which shall slow my descent, as has been done from balloons with something like an umbrella, as I have

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seen in pictures;" he thought this very quickly, made his way to the parapet, and leaped up on it and stood there teetering and afraid to look down and tore off the tape keeping it furled — damned awkward clumsy umbrella, it hadn't even a handle — and, flapping it madly to make it open, looked up and found that he was —

Frightful screams from inside the courtyard, the prisoners half-terrified of being scalped, and half-terrified of something worse: enter the Cornet Eszterhazy, veteran of two previous and rather longer campaigns; he drew his sword and announced that they were his and the Emperor's prisoners: they at once surrendered, all of them. All of them, that is, except the Brigand Boustremóvitch. He lay on his back, right where the keystone of the arch above the gate had in its falling caught him full upon the heart.

One of the prisoners was allowed to show where the barrels of wine were kept; and, as soon as they had finished tying up their captives, the captors began sampling the contents of the barrels. It was not bourbon, it was only the small local wine of the country and it would not travel far. But, then, of course, it was not being asked to.

After a rather wearing and roundabout route of travel, a certain group of foreigners had arrived in Bella earlier that day on one of the last trains to make it in. They had not, however, owing to unexpectedly unsettled conditions, been able to make it to their destination, namely in front of the Grand Hotel Windsor-Lido; they had not intended even to think of staying *at* the fashionable and expensive hotel . . . but they were absolutely determined to stay in front of it. Now, having been dismissed by the omnibus driver with a baffled shake of his hand and head at being unable to go anywhere that anyone wanted to go, they had — for lack of any notion of what to do — unfurled the banners they had brought with them, and simply commenced walking (being prudent, they had carefully noted the location and left one of their number in charge of the baggage). Scarcely had they marched a block or two when the sound of gunfire attracted their attention. And then they heard something which they could not believe they were hearing and next saw something which they could not believe they were seeing. It was at this point that Magnus, the sound of the anthem ringing in his ears, realized (a) that what he was waving was no umbrella but a very familiar flag; and (b) that down below, across the road, was a group of people looking up at him with open mouths and carrying two banners. One of the banners, a new one, read, **Swearing Eternal Fealty to the House of Olaus-Olaus-Astridson-Katzenelenbögen-Ulf-and-Olaus, Froreland Demands a Separate Bureau of Weights and Measures.** And the other, an old one barely legible, read, simply **A Fourteenth Full-Bishop For Faithful Froreland.**

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The Street of Our Noble Ally the Grand Duke of Graustark (usually called Grau Street) was, for a miracle, only half- instead of entirely-filled; taking advantage of this, the driver half-rose from the wagon-seat and began to ply his whip — but the horse, instead of dashing onward at increased speed, came to an abrupt stop. An odd, gaunt, whiskery figure wearing a Norfolk jacket and jodhpur trousers, taking the animal by the head, cried, "Stop, *stop!* How dare you lash this poor old chap? I am Sebastian Allgoode-Freestinghaze, formerly of the Fifth Hyderabad Horse (Piggot's Ponies), and now General Continental Agent for the RSPCA; I am obliged to remove the animal and lead him to our local contract livery stable and veterinary establishment, where he shall be able to receive the rest and medication so obviously requisite." And whilst Col. Allgoode-Freestinghaze was saying all this, and saying it rather rapidly, as though well-accustomed to saying it, he was with even greater rapidity releasing the horse from the wagon. Having done so (and handed over to the dumb-struck trio on the wagon a card printed with his name and local address), he — and the horse — vanished around the corner.

It was too much for the driver. His nerves broke; and, leaping from the seat, he dashed madly away, screaming as he did so, "The Works! The Works!" At which almost every living soul on the Street of Our Noble Ally the grand Duke of Graustark (usually called Grau Street), screaming, "The Turks! The Turks!" fled precipitately; in a moment no one and no thing remained there except the wagon and the two other men. They had simultaneously decided to follow the example of their fellow conspirator and had, in fact, simultaneously leaped; there was one difficulty — the man on the left had leaped to the right and the man on the right had leaped to the left — the laws of physics being what they are, the two had collided: and it was while they were shouting and screaming and flailing at each other that the clock-works in the infernal machine made it go off.

"Bobbo! Bobbo!" cried the children in the Infirmary, clapping their hands, and using their Sovereign's pet-name.

"Here's the funny old pedlar with his itty-bitty wagon of nicknacks," said His Royal and Imperial Majesty, wheeling it into the ward. "Who wants a posie? Posies cost one kiss. *Mweh! Mweh!* Who wants a little wooden cavalryman that moves its little wooden legs if you pull the little string? Costs one hand-shake. There you are, sir! Who wants some nice chewy Turkish Delight? Some nice chewy spice-drops, big as Bobbo's thumb? Sweetmeats cost one hug. Oh! What a big squeeze! *Whuh! Whuh!* Who wants . . . ?"

The children were clustering around him when there was a shudder of the whole building, followed by a loud, flat noise. The children

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immediately looked up at him to see if they should cry. "Practising the big boom fireworks for Bobbo's birthday, do you like big boom fireworks; do you like big sizzle-sparkle fireworks? Be good kiddies and say your prayers and take your medicine and sit on the potty-chair and make poo when nursey tells you, and you shall be allowed to come and watch the fireworks, see? How's the little footsey? 'Some better?' Not all better? Well, let Bobbo bend over and kiss and it will soon *be* all better because Bobbo is the Lord's Anointed, see, and if Dr. Quaatsch doesn't like it he can go . . . back to Vienna. This little piggy went to market. . . ."

They were all waiting for him when he got outside.

"What dreck-dribbling whoremongering sow-sucking son of a bitch was responsible for that punk-futtering explosion at this hour of the afternoon with no warning given to prepare the kids; I'll geld him like an oxling!"

And then they told him Everything.

The men in the tower were still gazing through their telescopes when the clock in the corner began the brief musical notes which announced that it would next sound the quarter-hour. Only one of them bothered to turn and glance at it, then he turned away. Then — very, very swiftly — he turned back. "Is that the same clock that was always there?" he demanded, his voice gone high and weak. This time they all turned. The clock in the corner began to sound the quarter-hour. They all rushed for the door. They did not quite make it.

The two devices were well-timed, and the explosions had really sounded like one.

Everything, that is, which they knew about to tell him.

"We'll see about this all, later," said the King-Emperor, suddenly not so much angry as weary. "Immediately I must get down there and show myself to calm the people," he said. "Bring the Whitey horse —"

Dr. Quaatsch stepped forward, cleared his throat. "As the Court Physician it is my duty to say that I cannot approve your Royal and Imperial Highness doing anything of the sort, and Your Royal and Imperial Highness very well knows why."

The Emperor looked at him. "I have my duty, too," he said.

The horse was (of course) white, the Emperor's uniform was white, the ostrich feather in his cap was white, the Emperor had not yet begun to stoop and was still usually tall and straight, and as he now chose for the most part to ride standing in the stirrups he was visible for blocks. "Fun's all over now," he said (and said); "go home now, boys. Go home. Go home. Spread the word."

Or: "Go home, wives. Go home, go home. It's soon time to put the spuds on, if you're not there the man will try to do it himself, scald the

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baby, and set the house on fire. Go home, ladies, go home — "

At the Five Points: ". . . *Amen.* . . . He doesn't fife no more, upon which I spit," said Emma Katterina, starting to get up, her Chaplain scrambling to help her, the three Ladies-in-Waiting hustling to hide their apparatuses and, this done, to help brush off her skirts. Emma Katterina looked up, looked around. "What, you are still down there?" she asked of those of the multitude yet on their knees. "Up, up, it's over, everything is now all right." She raised her voice as she started walking: "To home or to church! Go! Go!" She shook her skirts as though shooing chickens. "*Go!*"

"Boys [the Emperor], go home. Go —"

Voice from crowd: "But the Turks, Bobbo! What about the —"

"No more Turks! All gone! All gone!" — which was, historically, quite true, even if they had "all gone" a hundred-odd years earlier. "Go home. . . . "

Voice from crowd: "But what about that there Antichrist, Your Allness?"

Ignats Louis turned upon him in a well-simulated, well, perhaps it was not all simulated, fury. "I'll give you *'Antichrist,'* you dumb son of a bitch; you leave that sort of thing to the Archbishop, the Patriarch, and the Holy Synod! Go home, I say! Go home!"

["Ahh!" they said in the crowd. "That be a real Emperor, hear him cuss!"]

If the Frorish delegation was taken aback at seeing their Sovereign atop a palace wall, still, after all, they had come all the way to Bella *to* see him — however, they had not expected to see him waving the Frorish flag just a moment after they had been listening to the Frorish National Anthem. It was at this moment that he cupped his hands and called down to them, "I grant your demands!"

They did not cheer, being after all, Frores. After a moment one of them, The Patriotic Female Helga Helgasdochter, cupped her own hands and called back, "What, both of them?"

"Both of them!"

Silence. *He pressed her so strongly that he might soon have done her a mischief, had she not foiled him by her ready acquiescence. . . .*

Then: "The Scands will never approve!"

Magnus did not hesitate. "Then I shall abdicate . . . as King of Scandia, that is." And, the implications of this slowly dawning on them, they slowly applauded. The Frores, it is well-known, are not a people given to sudden enthusiasms. The Scands, as a matter of fact, *were* indeed loath to approve — until their approval was made contingent to the subsequent Trade Treaty whereby the surplus stockfish of both Scandia and Frore-

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land was sent to Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania in return for the Triune Monarchy's surplus wheat; after which the price of breadstuffs went down in both Far-Northwestern Kingdoms and *frorefish* (as it came to be known) grew abundant upon even the humblest table in the Triune Monarchy. But this was later. After. After, that is, young Cornet Esterhazy had persuaded Emma Katterina that all the Scotch steam engineers had gone on somewhere else. Baluchistan, maybe. Or Australia. And that the Royal and Imperial Ironroads could not only be obliged to pay *a thousand ducats a month* towards her charities, but would also build her a glassed-in drying shed for her laundry-drying, thus saying *Make clear the way* to a direct and swifter, cheaper rail route to the North.

Later.

After. After word had meanwhile gotten around of the rôle played by the staff of the Major James Elphonsus Dandy Great Texas and Wild West Show in the capture of the old Dalmatian Palace and the demise of the Brigand Boustremóvitch, the show's business boomed. And it kept on booming. Word, of course, had gotten distorted quite into folklore; but what of that? As for the brute Bruto and Pishto-the-Avar and the henchmen of the Boustremóvitch, they all became (usually: *again*) "ships' carpenters" in the dockyard/prison; it was hard work, but healthy, seeing the most of it was done in the open air. And perhaps it just might be that they were in some way less degraded as they hauled timber and heated tar and sawed and so on than if they had been confined instead in immense dungeons where they might or might not have tended to *reform* and to become *penitent*.

But this, too, was later.

By the time he had almost circumambulated the center of his city, Ignats Louis's voice was worn to a croak. Observing, then, a sign **Apothecary**, over the open door of a shop, and the apothecary in his apron standing in the doorway and thinking perhaps to ask him for a glass of mineral water, the Emperor beckoned. The man came over and the Emperor leaned down; in the man's ear he croaked, "My piles are killing me!"

"So I had assumed from Your Majesty's stance, standing in the stirrups the whole way down the street; so here I take the liberty of offering Your Majesty a pillule of opium and a large glass of mineral water and brandy," and he handed up first the one and then the other.

His Majesty took them, swallowed, swallowed, swallowed; then, with a grateful look, handed back both glass and saucer. In a voice considerably restored, he said, "You may add to your sign, **By Appointment** . . . and all the rest of it." Then he rode on, mostly he gestured; but by now, mostly, they knew the meaning of the gestures.

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Go home, boys. Go home. . .

Magnus, "Count Calmar," went home, too. The wandering Swiss photographer had stuck to his place throughout all the excitement and had, thus, been able to take quite a good picture of Magnus as he stood on the wall waving the Frorish flag. It sold forever back home. Only the colors distinguished the two flags, they having the same pattern, and the colors did not show in the photograph: in Scandia they said it was the flag of Scandia and in Froreland they *knew* it was the flag of Froreland. As to details, no one bothered them with details. Their Conjoint King had helped plant a National Flag on the walls of the palace which . . . somehow . . . he had helped be captured from a brigand: they had received a Hero in a time when it was often assumed that Heroism was dead: enough. The few republicans in the Two Kingdoms (mostly bankers, big brewers, and people like that) so to speak slunk back into their lairs, moodily drank their glög and shnops and ate their boiled stockfish with mutton-fat and bitterness. The King's return was a good deal jollier than his departure. As usual not much attention was given in the capital(s) to "Ole Skraelandi," but — later — on the golden-mossed moors of Skraeland itself the gifts of the many, many eagle feathers were gratefully received from the Court Shaman Eeiiuullaalaa in the name of the King. The King, of course, and most warmly, invited the young Cornet Eszterhazy to come and visit, and Eszterhazy — no long Cornet — did so. But that was later.

Much later.

Brief though immense the excitement had been; immense though brief. But he had had excitement before. This was different. It was a while, a long while in fitting together all that had happened. (Most people in Bella never *did*!) Even he had "pumped" the shaman and the medicine-man, via interpreters. Even he had gone over the great steam calliope again and again. (Could such vehicles be made to carry people, without rails?) Even he had examined the records of the police, both Public and Secret. Even . . .

It seemed to him that not alone a new world but a new universe had begun to open before his eyes, eyes from which the scales of ignorance had dropped. Gorgeous gates to which he had to find the keys. Knowledge! Knowledge! Science upon science — anthropology, ethnology, criminology, ornithology; history and law; medicine and mechanics; wisdom unsuspected and knowledge unknown. It was no longer possible to pass one's days as a sort of upper servant, a glorified messenger; drinking, dicing, riding, hunting, whoring: these could never again suffice. *Go thou and learn*, somewhere he had heard the words, forgotten where, never mind where, that is what he had to do. First a course,

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courses, of private studies with tutors, then the university here, then universities elsewhere, then travel. And then again: study . . . study . . . study.

He would of course have to sell his landed estates to pay for it, but no prospect ever gave him more pleasure. These new estates were greater.

Unfortunate Sir Paunceforth! A rumor, writhing slowly and steadily as an eel bound for the Sargasso, made its way eventually down the Baltic and into the North Sea and thence to London, and so, eventually, to Windsor. Sir Paunceforth De Pueue (unfortunate Sir Paunceforth!) thought fit to mention it to the Widow.

"They say, you know, Ma'am, that there was a sort of conspiracy recently in Froreland, don't you know, to depose their king and offer the throne to one of Your Majesty's younger sons; *haw!*"

The Queen looked at him, saying nothing. Perhaps she did not care to hear of Monarchs being deposed; perhaps she was thinking how willingly she would have sent one of her sons to Froreland (had it been possible), though not necessarily a younger son; perhaps she did not like anyone to say **haw!** to her. She said nothing.

Sir Paunceforth tried to save the situation, tried very hard to get across the point that this was a *fun*ny story. "They say, Ma'am, that the main dish there is boiled stockfish with mut-ton fat! . . . in Froreland . . . *Haw!*"

She looked at him with puffy, bloodshot, icy-blue little eyes. "We are not amused," she said.

Unfortunate Sir Paunceforth!

Then the Queen said, "*Where?*"

But as to *why* the bears were so bad in Bosnia that year. . . . ❦

Further Contributions to the Natural History of Love

After a while one gets used to being a frog,
Even though eating flies is a bit off-putting at first.
One day a lovely young woman came along and kissed me.
For a moment, I thought I'd been changed to a handsome young prince,
But then she said,
"Can't we be just friends?"

— Everett Lee Lady

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